

A
S Y S T E M
O F
CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY:
CONTAINING
AN EXPLANATION OF THE
DOCTRINES, DUTIES, AND PRECEPTS,
OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

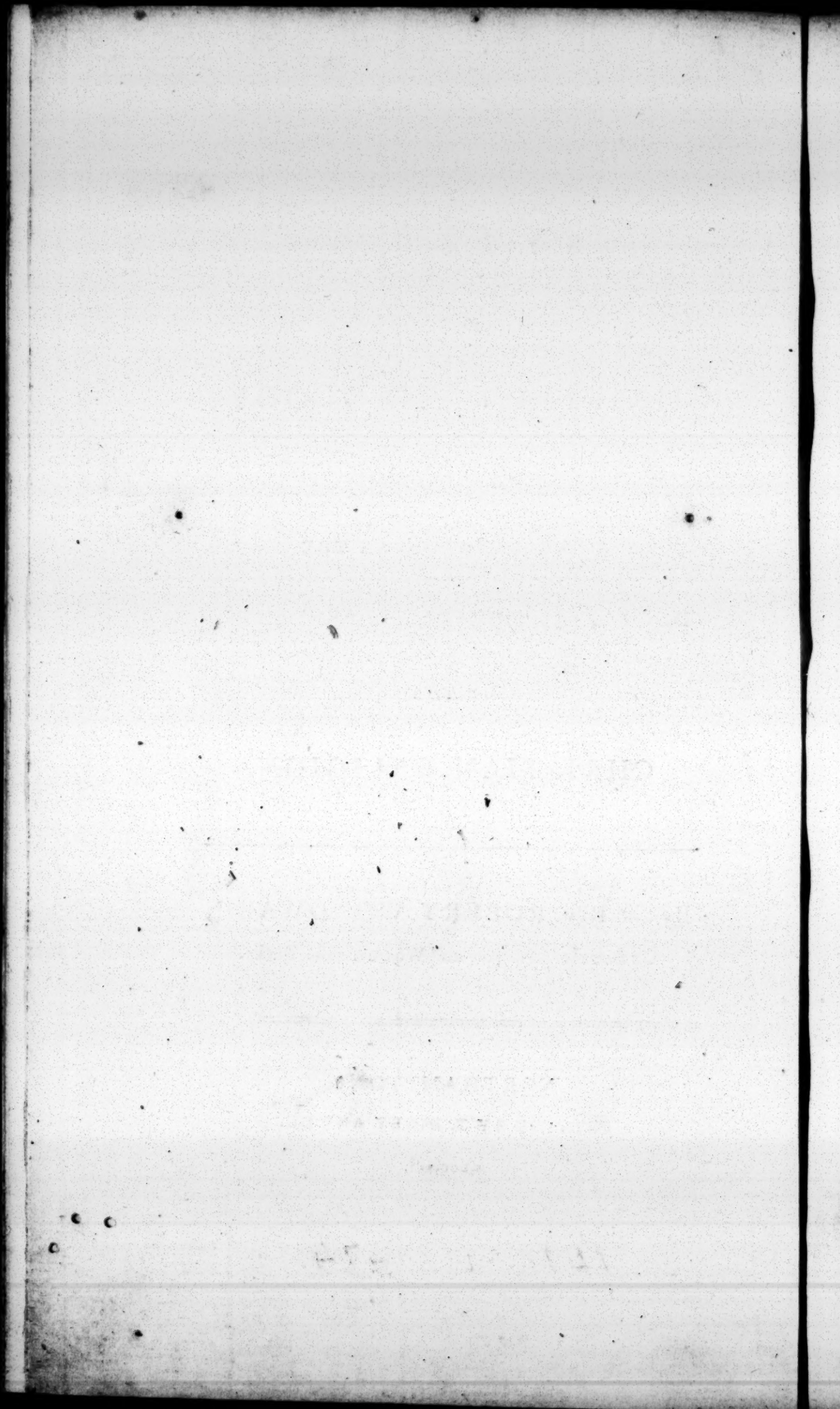
By the REV. ROBERT WOODWARD,
CURATE of MILTON and WUGHTON, Bucks.

NORTHAMPTON:
PRINTED BY T. DICEY AND CO.

M,DCC,XCI.

141. i. 474.

105



THE PREFACE.

THE following pages, entitled, A System of Christian Theology, are composed, or rather compiled, by the information and instruction I received from various authors, as well antient as modern. The method I took in the work was, by perusing carefully several books which contained discourses of the subjects I was about to treat of; and after comparing their opinions with the articles of the Church, and considering and digesting them in my own mind, I then wrote down my sentiments and reflections thereon in the manner they now are. In imitation of the holy fathers and others, I have concluded most of the subjects with an exhortation or application.

Among the antients I chiefly consulted Justin Martyr, Tertullian, St. Cyprian, St. Cyrill, St. Jerom, St. Augustin, St. Chrysostom, &c. and among later writers Hieronymus, Zanchius, Bellarmin, Phillipi a Limborch, J. Busæus, &c. Among those of our own nation, Dr. Jackson, Dr. Sherlock, Pearson on the

Creed, Bishop Wilkins, Stillingfleet's Origines Sacrae, Dr. Barrow, Dr. Bently, Dr. Williams, Parsons's Directory by Stanhope, &c.

In this undertaking I have not aimed at sublimity of language, being well aware of my own inability; nor was it my wish had I even been equal to the attempt; as I designed this book principally for such of the laity who have not the opportunity of reading larger and better tracts of divinity; and who perhaps may often hear the sacred truths of religion (in the belief and practice of which they hope for salvation) called in question or ridiculed; and not having that particular point fairly and clearly explained, their faith is shaken, and they disqualified. For this reason, therefore, I have undertaken this work, and have attempted to handle some even controverted points of the present day. Most of the sentiments herein delivered are the instructions and doctrines of those pious worthies, who, for their learning and probity, were stiled the fathers of the Church, and who living near the apostolic age are more likely to understand the true meaning of several parts of religion, than we who think ourselves refined.

THE CONTENTS.

P A R T I.

Of the Doctrines of the Christian Religion.

CHAPTER I. On Natural Religion.

2. The Certainty of a supreme Being.
 3. Of the Holy Scriptures.
 4. Of the Resurrection.
 5. Of the last general Judgment.
 6. Of Predestination.
 7. Of the Angels.
 8. Of wicked Angels or Devils.
 9. Of Providence.
 10. Of the Incarnation.
 11. Of the Holy Spirit.
 12. Of the Trinity.
-

P A R T II.

Of the Duties of the Christian Religion.

CHAPTER I. Of Piety.

2. Of Faith.
3. Of Hope and Trust in God.
4. Of Charity.
5. Of Humility.
6. Of Temperance.
7. Of Contentment.
8. Of Consideration.
9. Of Praise and Thanksgiving.

PART

• • •

P A R T III.

Of the Precepts of the Christian Religion.

- CHAPTER I. Of the Love of God.
2. Of the Love of our Neighbour.
 3. Of private Devotion.
 4. Of public Worship.
 5. Of Repentance.
 6. Against Swearing.
 7. Of the Sacraments.
 8. Of Baptism.
 9. Of the Lord's-Supper.
 10. Of the Mortification of the Passions.
 11. Of Death, and the Preparation for it.
 12. Of the Qualification of the heavenly Life.

P A R T I.

OF THE DOCTRINES OF THE CHRISTIAN
RELIGION.

C H A P T E R I.

Of Natural Religion.

RELIGION or divine worship has been in every age, and still continues to be, the primary concern and principal meditation of the wise and considerate: impressed with a sense of gratitude and praise for the blessings they enjoy, and anxious for their future welfare, they esteem all other things to be only of a secondary and subordinate importance.

Many and very different have been the ways invented by mankind for the discharge of this duty; and these not only among the unenlightened, where nature was their only guide, but even amongst the happier nations who are blessed with the revealed will of God. The various and whimsical ceremonies adapted by the Gentiles, are very expressive of their ignorance of God; and
even

even the modes of worship practised by the wiser heathens or philosophers, plainly declare the deficiency of their knowledge in divine things. Although they were extolled, and that justly, for their morality and the management of civil affairs; for the rules established by those strict observers of honour and integrity, will always be proper examples of imitation; yet their religious institutions bear no resemblance to their renowned wisdom and dexterity in planning wholesome laws of temporal government. This observation convinces us how utterly at a loss mankind are to discharge that homage and adoration to the Deity they deem so incumbent. The rites and ceremonies of religion performed and observed by all countries, previous to their knowledge of revelation, plainly indicate their earnestness of devotion: and the superb and beautiful temples dedicated to their imaginary Gods, shew them to be impressed with notions suitable to the majesty and excellence of the Supreme Being.

Is it at all wonderful that mankind of their own accord should be led to give praise and adoration, when they contemplate the mighty works of the visible creation, and observe the beauteous order of nature? From a proper observation of such things as strike the outward senses, they are induced

induced to turn them inwardly, and reflect upon themselves, or their own being: in which act they infer that they were not placed in this world to do their own pleasure, but were sent here for some higher purpose. Yet it is only the more serious and wiser part of mankind that were excited to religious inventions of worship, from the knowledge they attained by observation and experience, or by reason and argument; deducing effects from their proper causes, or finding out the cause by its effects. And it is astonishing to find in the writings of the wiser heathens, their knowledge of the immortality of the soul: this notion must proceed either from natural instinct, or from arguments drawn from reasoning, and serious consideration. For people in every age, whose understandings are darkened by attending wholly to the concerns of this world, can have but an imperfect discernment of divine things. But indeed so much is the subject above human reach, that the wisest philosophers with all reasoning still remained unsatisfied. They knew not how, or which way, they were to prepare their souls for immortality. Unaided by revelation, they only found themselves the more miserable, the farther their researches extended. One of the greatest of these at his death expressed himself thus: In doubts have

B

I lived

I lived, and in more anguish do I die, whither I shall go I know not ; therefore thou Being of Beings, have mercy on me. Such was the confession of the great Aristotle.

That which concerns God, and heaven, and heavenly things, was of too sublime a nature to be clearly comprehended by uninstructed man, in his natural state. But if the Gentiles could not rest satisfied or easy in the neglect of religious worship, a duty which they deemed their primary concern ; and were zealous in the performance of rites which nature prompted them to pay : much more earnest ought Christians to be in the duties of praise and adoration ; being directed thereto by the express revealed will of God ; and even in that guided by a clearer light than ever was manifested in former revelations.

There are some things which may be known by the light of nature, without the help of revelation : of this kind is the knowledge of God, visible to the senses of man by the works of creation and providence ; and from his own inward consciousness he deems religious worship absolutely expedient and necessary : but in what manner he should perform it, so as to be acceptable to the Deity, is impossible to be known by the light of nature, without the help of revelation.

Of

Of the immortality of the soul he had an imperfect discernment, but then it was seeing through a glass darkly : whereas that is only made certain and evident by the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Thus mankind by the light of natural religion only wandered in error and uncertainty, destitute of the chiefest happiness and greatest good ; as being ignorant of the will of God, and of the heavenly life. In this state the greatest pleasures the world afforded, yielded but small enjoyment ; though in full possession of all the conveniences and even the luxuries of life ; yet the want of this spiritual knowledge, and the thought that the continuance of his being hung in doubt before him, was a great alloy to the highest epicurean splendor, and in a manner subversive of all terrestrial delights. Is it possible that any one endowed with the powers of reasoning can rest satisfied and easy in the neglect and omission of divine worship, even if he was not directed thereto by revelation ? Can he partake of the bounties of nature, receive the good things of this life, enjoy the pleasing vicissitudes of the seasons, perceive the order of nature under the management of an infinite power, himself shielded and defended by

the same invifible providence from manifelt hazards and dangers? can any confiderate perfon reconcile himfelf, and remain happy and quiet without making a return of praife and thankfgiving? No, thofe who receive the favours of heaven unmindful and regardless of them, are fuch as the prophet complains of, who confider not.

Many confidently affert, that mankind are by nature inclined to worfhip and adoration, from this obfervation; that no country or people whatever, whether of antient or modern discoveries, were found deftitute of divine adoration: none but by fome outward emblems fhewed their propenfity to this duty. Add to this the fense which all have who think ferioufly of the expediency of this duty; even were they not directed thereto by revelation: and this opinion more or lefs predominates according to men's capacities and difpofitions. It is but feldom feen that lafting happinefs accompanies a life neglectful of religion; for when the mind is wearied out with the emptinefs and vanity of worldly pleasures, it is then defirous to be fixed upon fome joys that are more fubftantial and refined; it grieves for the time wafte in fenfual delights, unmindful of the bufinefs for the difcharge of which he finds himfelf endowed with fuitable faculties. If this uneafinefs was the confequence

quence of spiritual negligence in an unenlightened state; the reflections of conscience must be much more distressful to those who are guilty of the same under the gospel dispensation, whereby so great a portion of divine light is afforded. Where this duty is urged upon mankind not only by nature, but by the revelation of the Deity himself; and wherein he has given directions for the right performance of it; then the discharge thereof becomes doubly incumbent.

This is the case of us Christians; for we are assured of a Supreme Being from what we see in the visible world; and from the works of creation and providence we infer the obligation of religion. And these notions which naturally result from reflection, are made certain by revelation.

Therefore, since Almighty God has manifested himself to mankind, and vouchsafed to declare the terms upon which we are to be accepted or rejected at the last day; let us be diligent and careful to read and understand those scriptures which contain the doctrines of salvation.

The affair about which every serious and thinking person is anxiously inquisitive, is that of life eternal: consider, therefore, how much future happiness exceeds all that this life has to offer: how greatly it will recompence

recompence all the pains, the care, and caution of the strictest enquirer : how unconceivable and unfullied are the joys promised to obedience ; and we shall think no pains or study too great on our parts, in order to be fully satisfied how we are to conduct ourselves so as to obtain blifs and happiness in the future life. It behoves every one that professes Christianity, and wishes to enjoy the serene pleasures of a pious life, and to inherit the gracious promises annexed to that profession, diligently to peruse and comprehend the conditions upon which they are proposed, and to be careful to understand the whole gospel covenant. And this knowledge is to be acquired by a regular attendance on the service of God : for now and then hearing a sermon as it were by chance, does not answer the end to edify and instruct ; or at least in that way which every considerate person wishes to be instructed. Having so many helps and encouragements to search and seek after future happiness, let us not faint or grow remiss in that progress which hereafter will abundantly recompence our labour. Let us study the word of God with assiduity and diligence ; not carelessly or negligently, but after such a manner as the importance of the subject demands ; and let us proceed with chearfulness and vigour in the concern
of

of futurity; and, by the help of God's grace, may we be able to solve every seeming difficulty that obstructs our proficiency therein. Let us seriously call to mind the solemn things that will shortly be presented to our view; that whenever the awful time arrives, we may give up our accounts with joy, and receive the reward which God has promised to them that serve and obey him.

CHAPTER II.

Of the certainty of God's existence.

AS a slight observance and contemplation of the things in this visible world sufficiently proves the being of God; and as there are but few either hardy enough or so destitute of reason as to deny it; there is therefore but little occasion to say much concerning a truth universally acknowledged: and what is here offered from reason and scripture is more by way of reminding than convincing.

1st. In the 14th Psalm, 1st verse, the Psalmist observes, The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God. And surely if a person is capable of observation and reflection

tion, he must, in the outward frame of the world, see evident marks of a Supreme Being displayed.

This belief, which is the foundation of all religion, does not, like some obstruse points, require deep and intense application to convince and satisfy; for we are assured and reminded of it every hour of our lives; and sometimes in an extraordinary manner by tremendous occurrences of nature. How can we do otherwise than confess and acknowledge the existence of God, when we constantly experience the vicissitude and change of day and night, winter and summer, spring-time and harvest? or when we contemplate the rising and setting of the sun, moon, and stars; these signify unto us, not only that God is, but likewise his power and wisdom. The Psalmist confesses this in the 19th Psalm: The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work. And the wise Cicero in considering these things, exclaimed, What can be so clear and perspicuous, when we view the heavens and contemplate things celestial, as that there is a Deity of great perfection by which they are governed and preserved.

The beauty, elegance, and uniformity of the skies, are particularly instructive of it's
powerful

powerful Architect. It is God who commands the sun to run his course, and the moon to perform her several revolutions round the world ; who causes the clouds to pour down the rain, and the earth to produce it's fruits for the use and service of man.

The animal and vegetable creation yield manifest attestations of the Creator's existence, his power, and goodness ; nay, we need go no farther than ourselves for proof of a Deity. Wherefore the Psalmist cried out, I am fearfully and wonderfully made ; marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well.

We are situated in the midst of so many and manifest evidences of this truth, that it is impossible we can be void of this belief, which is the foundation of religion, viz. that God is.

2dly. Let us consider what the holy scriptures teach concerning this :

When Moses wrote his history of the creation, he did not pretend this particular ; because they did not in the least doubt of God's existence, having heard his voice in a tremendous storm of thunder and lightning, in the delivery of their law, at Mount Sinai. Moreover having the account of the flood, the preservation of Noah and his family

C

family

• 7

mily in the ark; and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrhah, which happened but a few years before, and were delivered down to them by tradition. Indeed the Jews experienced so many miracles, and were favoured with so many mercies of God; being more particularly under his guidance and protection, that they could not be otherwise than always fully possessed with a belief of his being. But I will forbear, at this time, to say more in confirmation of a truth universally allowed. Let us consider how much the belief of God's existence should influence our words and actions, and make us attentive and careful to do that which is pleasing in his sight. If we are assured that there is a God who made us, and still preserves and governs us, let us not offend him by wantonly taking his name in vain, and in a haughty, foolish manner, invoking the dreadful Majesty of heaven and earth: a crime often committed by the unthinking and the vulgar; the magnitude of which I have described in another place.

Be assured, in the mean time, that God will not be mocked, for he both hears and sees all we say and do; no privacy or retirement can exclude him who knows all things, even our very thoughts and intentions. Remember that a contempt of the laws God has given to man, will be extremely dangerous;

dangerous ; they are for the rule and guide of our lives ; and to which let us be conformable.

C H A P T E R I I I .

Of the Holy Scriptures.

ALTHOUGH by the light of nature and reason we come to the knowledge of God, yet we have need of supernatural assistance to direct us in the discharge of our duty towards him. We are no sooner convinced of God's existence, than we begin to be anxious to act and demean ourselves so as to please him ; and are desirous to know what is his will, what conduct will recommend us to his favour, and what will render us objects of his displeasure. By a little reflection on the wisdom and goodness of God, we may perceive that he created mankind for some greater end than the felicity of the present life : that he had some nobler purposes in view, when he gave us our being : that he designed us for a happier state, and created us to be immortal. Impressed with this idea, we find ourselves concerned to obtain the approbation of the disposer of our

fate. And in this respect we are not left to wander in ignorance and uncertainty : God has clearly revealed his will to us, and declared the duties and laws we are to observe and practise, for our good here and hereafter. This rule of duty and adoration is contained in the scriptures of the old and new testament ; and the excellent morality, and the sound institutes of religion, bespeak them to be of divine original. Why should any doubt that the scriptures were written by the inspiration of God, seeing he certainly has a right and power to make what revelations of himself he pleases ? Is it difficult for the Creator to reveal his will to his creatures, when one creature can declare his will to another ? The scriptures, every impartial person must confess, contain many useful precepts and examples ; the observance whereof has always been found to be productive of the peace and welfare of societies : they are entirely consistent with reason, and agreeable to the notions we naturally form of the Deity. The Bible is acknowledged to be the oldest history in the world : its very antiquity therefore merits veneration.

That form of worship which God prescribed the chosen people, was solemn and splendid ; abounding with many and magnificent rites and ceremonies, necessary for salvation : all which have been dispensed with,

with, and done away by the Son of Man, the Saviour of the world ; who, by his appearance in the flesh, fulfilled all that was foretold of him in the law and the prophets, and gave a merciful and gracious law, that was not only to concern the Jews, but the whole world ; for our Lord came to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of his people Israel.

The salvation of our souls may now be obtained upon most easy terms, by that covenant which our Lord purchased with his blood ; the condition of which we have faithfully marked down to us in the gospel ; where, besides our duty to God, we are strictly exhorted to observe mutual love and affection one to another : in short, in this last overture of grace, we are taught the finest morality that can be observed or practised.

Let us remember that now we cannot plead ignorance ; and we are informed of the consequence, if we know our master's will, and do it not. Better had it been for us not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after we have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto us. Let us be diligent in making the proper use of that divine light which illuminates the mind, that so it's wholesome instructions

instructions may outwardly appear in a virtuous life.

CHAPTER IV.

Of the Resurrection.

NO article of the Christian faith was believed with greater reluctance, or more puzzled the minds of those who trusted to their own reasoning, than this of the resurrection from the dead. Some thought it not only impossible, but the very notion of it altogether ridiculous. Thus was St. Paul's discourse about this point entertained at Athens, as related in the 17th Chapter of Acts. Hearing the resurrection of the dead, some of them mocked; others said, we will hear thee again of this matter. But no good argument can be advanced, why this should be deemed a thing impossible to God, or improbable and inconsistent with reason. Why should it be thought more difficult for God to raise and quicken a dead body, than at first to create it from the dust of the ground, and to inspire it with a living soul? or why should he not as easily perform this, as from seed sown in the ground, and there corrupted, to cause such beautiful
plants

plants to spring forth? certainly he who produces such wonderful changes and revolutions in the natural world, can as easily effect a resurrection of the body.

In the beginning of Christianity, although some absolutely denied it, as the Sadducees, yet various opinions subsisted concerning it: for certain interpreted the resurrection to be spiritual, by which we are to rise from the death of sin unto a life of righteousness and holiness. And they were persuaded of this, from the 6th of St. Paul's epistle to the Romans, verse 4, 5. Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that, like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. And in the 5th of Ephesians, verse 14. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. Of this sort seemed to Hymenæus and Philletus, who asserted that the resurrection was already past: of whom the Apostle writes, 2 Timothy, 2 chap. 18 verse: Who concerning the truth have erred, saying, that the resurrection is past already. Many thought that, by this doctrine, no more was to be understood, than the being raised from a state of darkness and ignorance by the illuminating precepts of the gospel, and being directed thereby in the way to eternal
and

and immortal bliss and glory. And, according to this error, they placed eternal life in that tranquillity of the mind which arises from the exercise of virtue : and they called it eternal, because it is a happiness of which nothing can deprive us. It must be confessed that there is mention made of a spiritual resurrection : but this is prescribed us that we may be partakers of the true and corporal one.

When a resurrection is declared to us, and that in future, no other can be understood than the real and true ; which is to be the reward of our obedience, or the punishment of our neglect. And this appears from the circumstances of the resurrection related by St. Paul : We shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump ; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed : by which he means, that some shall be found alive on that day, and that the already dead shall be suddenly called forth. Therefore a resurrection from sin, cannot be a resurrection of the just and unjust. If we are to expect nothing beyond the enjoyments of this life, then are we of all men most miserable.

We are assured in the scriptures, that the true resurrection is that which is future and eternal in the last day ; when God by his
almighty

almighty power will raise mankind from their graves, and re-animate their mouldered dust, by again uniting their bodies to their souls; which, as it were, he hath reserved for that day.

The truth of this resurrection may be gathered from hence: 1st. Although, in the old testament, it was more obscurely declared, yet God had given some tokens and intimations that men were designed for immortality; that, by a proper attention, a resurrection might be inferred from the literal sense of several texts. Thus from the words of God himself, long after the death of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Our Lord, by a most plain and irresistible argument, clearly proves that these will rise again: because that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

Among the many instances that indicate a resurrection, we may observe the following: Jonas, who had been three days and three nights in the whale's belly, came forth thence as it were from his tomb: the restoring to life the son of the widow of Zarephath, by Elijah; the son of the Shunamite, by Elisha; and the miraculous inspiring with life the dead bones, as mentioned by Ezekiel, chap. 37. These may

D

be

be considered as indications of a resurrection; to which this prophecy of Daniel may be added, so very expressive of that future event: Many that sleep in the dust of the earth, shall hear his voice and come forth, some to life eternal, and some to shame and contempt. From hence it is evident, that God is not only able, but also that it is his will, to raise men up at the last day. But the resurrection of the dead is most plainly confirmed by our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath destroyed death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. In that divine covenant which our Lord purchased by his sufferings, a promise of a resurrection is annexed; as a proof whereof, our Saviour himself was raised up the third day, by the power of the Father; and is, by the Apostle, in the 15th of Corinthians, styled, the first fruits of them that slept. In which whole chapter the Apostle proves our resurrection, from that of our Lord's; teaching us, that if we believe Christ to have risen, we ought also to believe that we ourselves shall rise again.

To make us more certain in this particular, our Lord was pleased to shew himself alive after his crucifixion; and gave the fullest assurance that he was the same person, and the same body, which they beheld a few days before fastened to the cross; but

but was now become the first fruits of the resurrection.

This event is to be general ; all are subject to death, and to a resurrection : for it is appointed unto all men once to die, but after death, the judgment. Which last circumstance is the immediate consequence of the resurrection, and will fix the doom both of the just and the unjust ; according to St. John : For behold the hour cometh when all that are in their graves shall hear his voice and come forth ; they that have done good, to the resurrection of life ; and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation. From these words we are taught, that the resurrection hath respect unto the body, as well as the soul : for what else but the body, which was laid in the grave, can be supposed to come forth at the call of Christ ; the soul being adjudged to an intermediate state, until it's re-union with the body at the last day ; when both will receive their full consummation of happiness or misery. Let us, therefore, be careful to make a proper use of this part of divine revelation ; and in order to this, and to make it beneficial to our salvation, we must not entertain any notions of it, than only such as are scriptural.

Let us not be mistaken in this principal part of religion, by harbouring an opinion

D 2

that

that nothing further is meant, than a conversion from a life of wickedness and sin, to piety and holiness: and that we are to enjoy peace and tranquillity in this world; from a conscientious discharge of our duty: or that the resurrection has respect only to the spirit: for the holy scriptures are very expressive of this particular, viz. that our bodies are to be raised glorious and immortal, and re-united to our souls to all eternity: therefore it behoves us so to act that we may present ourselves unto God, a holy and lively sacrifice, acceptable unto him; that we may be accounted worthy of a happy resurrection. For if the spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his spirit that dwelleth in you.

A proper meditation on this subject, will enable us to bear every adversity of life with fortitude, and even death itself: and will be serviceable in promoting and augmenting our happiness, knowing, that after the expiration of this short life, if we are stedfast in the faith, we shall enter upon a glorious eternity. For although death dissolves the close union between soul and body, yet a Christian looks upon that event as a sleep, rather than death; that notwithstanding the body suffers corruption and is reduced
to

to dust, yet the soul will awake and live; will be consigned to an intermediate state of glorious expectation; and wait, full of hope and joy, for the restoration of the body. To the righteous the sting of death is taken away, for after their departure hence, they reckon to receive the reward of their good deeds; but this reward is only to be obtained by a virtuous and godly life: if we continue firm in the covenant we entered into with God at our baptism, we are promised an inheritance which will last for ever.

CHAPTER V.

Of the last general Judgment.

WHEN the whole world, by general summons, is to be arranged in regular order around the divine throne, and eternal sentence to be passed according to their deserts; then will the angels come forth in the execution of their office, and sever the wicked from among the just; and cause the one to enter upon an eternity of torments, but will introduce the latter into a state of everlasting felicity. In handling this subject, these two things offer themselves to our consideration:

1st. The

1st. The certainty of a future judgment.

2dly. The manner of proceeding according as it is declared in the scriptures.

We learn from the gospel, that the last judgment is to be the immediate consequent of a resurrection, to which all men are to be cited, that they may receive the due reward of their deeds. That God has appointed a day for this judgment, before the creation of the world, appears from the 25th chapter of Matthew, and the 34th verse: Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Almighty God has manifested this irrevocable decree, at various times, even in the old testament, though more obscurely both in the law and the prophets. 13th Hof. v. 14. I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death. And again in the 12th chapter of Daniel: And many that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake and come forth, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

The wise author of Ecclesiasticus, after meditating on the state of human affairs, and the common occurrences of life, and observing that the righteous and the wicked fared alike; that God, to all appearance, was impartial in the dispensations of his
favours

favours and of his displeasure ; he therefore infers, that there must be a future judgment passing upon all men, both good and bad ; whereby these seeming incongruities in the administration of providence, may be rectified : his words are these, I said in my heart, God shall judge the righteous and wicked ; and, as an inducement to piety and the observance of God's commandments, he further adds, For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

But the circumstances, and the certainty, of the last day, are more clearly revealed in the new testament ; where it is said, the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with the angels, and then shall he reward every man as his work shall be. And in the 12th chapter of St. Luke, our Saviour gives this assurance : There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known. Therefore, whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness, shall be heard in the light ; and that which ye have spoken in the ears, in closets, shall be proclaimed upon the house tops. For the Lord hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained ; whereby he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead ; and, as
expressed

expressed in our creed, he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty ; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

It is necessary and fit that there should be a future judgment, as well as reasonable for us to expect it : and the scriptures give us full satisfaction of this expectation. For God every where declares himself a lover of righteousness, and a hater of iniquity : therefore we may be assured that he will reward the good, and punish the wicked, if not in this world, yet most certainly in another. We frequently see the righteous, in this life, afflicted with heavy calamities, immersed in trouble, or exposed to the scorn and insults of their enemies ; while the wicked abound in wealth and plenty, and, to all outward appearance, are entirely at ease, all things happening according to their wish : from hence it is evident that there will be a day, in which God will render to every one according to their works : and will assign to the one, a reward proportionable to their services ; and to the other, a punishment suitable to their crimes ; this, in the 3d. chapter of Acts, is called, the times of restitution of all things.

In the present confused state of things, the wicked, mixed with the good, live
securely ;

securely; and with respect to outward felicity, it is impossible to form any judgment of the piety or impiety of any one, or of God's love or hatred; for they promiscuously enjoy the good things of the world, equally partake of the blessings and bounties of nature; for God sendeth rain upon the fields of the just and the unjust, and causeth the sun to shine on the evil and on the good. But the tares grow up together with the wheat, yet in the last day God will allot to every one their proper portion, and will separate the tares from the wheat; for according to the 13th of St. Matthew, The angels will gather out of the kingdom of the Son of Man, all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and will make a distinction between the just and the unjust: as was foretold by the prophet Malachi, 3d chapter: Then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not.

To what is already mentioned of the certainty of a future judgment, I will add the testimony of conscience, which accuses and tortures the guilty, not from the fear of human punishment; for it is possible for the wicked to sin so secretly, that none are witnesses to their crimes but God and themselves: therefore their trouble arises from

E

the

. . .

the dread of God's wrath against their evil doings; which, though they escape often in this world, and at present experience no punishment or suffering for their sins, yet the reflections of conscience give them an undoubted and manifest testimony of a future judgment, where the wicked will be doomed to everlasting torments, but the righteous to life eternal.

2dly. I am to consider the manner of the proceeding in the general judgment, at the last day, as revealed in the scriptures: and on discoursing on this head, three particulars are to be considered, viz. the Judge, the persons to be judged, and the circumstances attending it.

1st. Almighty God, the Supreme Lord and Governor of all things, has especially constituted his Son, our Saviour, to be the Judge of all men; For the Father judgeth no man, but has committed all judgment to the Son. And here I cannot help observing (as I pass along) the infinite kindness of God, in permitting and ordaining the same person to be our judge, who mercifully condescended to take our nature upon him, to subject himself to our infirmities, and, being acquainted with human frailty and weakness, to become our mediator.

Our Saviour, then, is the person who is appointed judge of the world; in which
office,

office, we are assured that he will be just, impartial, and severe; and that there is no receding from his sentence to an higher tribunal. To this all-knowing judge, the most secret and hidden things are open and perspicuous: it is impossible to deceive him, or to find a patron of a bad cause: he is just, and will judge without respect of persons; and almighty, being armed with that power by which he subdueth all things to himself.

Now the persons to be judged are all mankind, the good and the bad, the living and the dead, who will be called forth from their tombs to be exposed to this judgment. St. Paul says, in his 2d epistle to the Corinthians, 10th verse: For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. At that great day will the whole world meet and be present, when the earth and sea will give up the dead bodies that were committed unto them: and heaven and hell will send back the souls they possessed, to be again united to their bodies. Reflect into how great a judgment you are to enter, where the whole race of mankind are to be assembled. To our thinking, the number must be innumerable. Were only the present inhabitants of the

earth to be collected together, the concourse must be great. But when all that have lived in the world from Adam to the final consummation of all things, shall be collected together, the multitude must be surprizingly large. Yet large as the number will be, all hopes of evasion will be taken away; the scrutinizing and keen search of the angels, who are to be the attendants and guards upon this extraordinary occasion, will find out and bring to judgment every individual. Great as we may think the concourse of mankind, at the time we are considering, yet the number of those heavenly officers will be much superior; as appears from this argument: That if the earth which is the centre, contains so many inhabitants, how much greater number must the heavens contain, which surround it: The inhabitants of the heaven of heavens are immense; for it is written by Daniel, Thousands, thousands minister unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him. From hence appears the impossibility of escaping, and the certainty that we shall be led forth to give an account of our whole lives: no secret corner of the world can hide us from it: no magnificence or power can shield or protect us from it; for though riches and greatness distinguish between one person and another for a few years

years in this world, yet, at the time I am now meditating, nothing will make us great and happy, but only having been rich in good works. Since all are to be awakened, and all are to be summoned by the sound of the angelic trump, let us consider the causes for which we are to be cited to this solemn tribunal.

Reason alone, without further aid, is sufficient to inform us, that we were designed for futurity ; and the gracious revelations of God have instructed us how to prepare for it : in which he has prescribed laws and rules useful and necessary for the present, as well as the eternal state.

The terms upon which immortal salvation is offered in the gospel, are both easy and pleasant to be observed : yet, easy as they are, how few are careful to live up to their salutary directions ; how few are careful to discharge the duty they owe to God, or to practice benevolence, pity, and kindness towards each other. On the contrary, how ready are many to act opposite to God's commands, to profane and blaspheme his hallowed name ; and instead of exercising the precepts of piety and morality dictated by our Saviour, are too apt to seize every opportunity of defrauding, injuring, and oppressing their brethren.

These,

These, and such like, are the causes which will be brought against mankind in judgment, to their eternal condemnation.

“ * What an inestimable treasure will a
 “ good conscience be in that day ! a con-
 “ science that will stand our friend, when
 “ the wicked great ones will stand trembling
 “ and confounded, and have nothing to
 “ urge in excuse of those sins in which they
 “ now glory. From the alarming punish-
 “ ment nothing can rescue them : for the
 “ judge is too powerful to be awed, and too
 “ just to be bribed. Submission and re-
 “ pentance come too late, and will not be
 “ accepted : intercession of friends can be
 “ of no avail. How dreadful must be the
 “ condition of those miserable wretches who
 “ were once hardy in wickedness, and glo-
 “ ried in their crimes. In comparison of
 “ theirs, the most pitiable and distressed
 “ situation in this life, is but trifling.
 “ Destitute of the least glimpse of hope or
 “ comfort, where can they flee from the
 “ terrors with which they are surrounded ?
 “ Above them they behold an angry and
 “ offended God. Beneath, they see hell
 “ ready to receive them : their sins flying
 “ in their faces and accusing them, and the
 “ infernal fiends ready for the execution of
 “ their office in inflicting the eternal pu-
 “ nishments according to their sentence. In
 vain

* Parsons.

“ vain shall they wish for death; for a
 “ second death there cannot be. In vain
 “ will they cry to the mountains, for they
 “ cannot cover them. Thus abashed and
 “ astonished must they stand in the pre-
 “ sence of a provoked God, and an abused
 “ Saviour, till he, whose compassion for
 “ mankind, was once so exceedingly great
 “ as to die for them,—till he shall utter
 “ the dreadful sentence, Go, ye cursed,
 “ into everlasting fire.”

A life spent in sensual and sinful delights
 exposes men to this very dismal and shock-
 ing sentence. How careful should you be
 to decline and avoid every thing that may
 tempt you to sin: and how earnest in the
 exercise of those duties by which you may
 prevent those terrible words being pro-
 nounced upon you. Let, therefore, the
 precepts of religion be your first and chief
 care; and let all other things be of secon-
 dary concern, and subordinate to it. For
 if by too great an attachment to things of
 this world, you neglect your duty towards
 God and your neighbour, and consume
 your lives in riot and wickedness, remember
 how very dear you are like to pay for it.
 Think how poor and mean will riches, and
 honour, and worldly grandeur, seem at that
 awful day: and the pleasure you take in
 them will only be a bitter remembrance
 and

and torment for ever. But those persons will be filled with a joyful hope of their reward, who have led an honest, painful, virtuous life, and travelled to heaven, tho' through the roughest ways of poverty, affliction, and contempt. It matters not what our condition is in this world, for wealth does not expose the owner to the terrors of hell, unless it is abused and applied to an improper use: for if they are pious and faithful, they are the objects of his care and delight. So, on the other hand, neither will a state of poverty procure to the wicked a sentence of blessedness from the heavenly throne: if they are righteous and good they will receive an higher inheritance in the kingdom of their Father, for the sufferings they experience in the want of the comforts and necessities of life: and from the parable of Lazarus, they may expect to be regarded by their Saviour with an eye of compassionate tenderness, who once endured a like state of poverty himself. Nothing, as I mentioned before, will be effectual to our salvation, or procure favour in the sight of God, but an eager desire to do his will, and an especial care that our actions are conformable to his commands: or as St. Paul professes, having a conscience void of offence, both towards God and towards men. If
we

we would often meditate on the certainty of a future judgment, and the consequences attending it, we should be more circumspect in our conduct, more watchful over our words and actions; for, recollect, that every error and crime is marked down: therefore when the allurements of vice tempt you to sin, let this thought deter you from it, and keep you to duty: or when you heedlessly take the name of God in vain, remember the sad punishment you expose yourself to; and let this imperfect hint here given, be a warning to enter upon a penitent and religious course of life; remembering the account you must one day make to that God who now seeth in secret, but hereafter will punish or reward openly. All preparation for futurity must be made in this life; for when death puts an end to our earthly existence, our probation ceases, and repentance will not be accepted.

As death, like the day of judgment, is unknown to us, how exceedingly blameable is it to neglect or defer the duties of piety and devotion; since in the due discharge thereof our eternal happiness depends. Let, therefore, the meditation of this important affair be often, nay, continually, present to our minds; which will help to keep us from all impious and vicious behaviour, and excite us to a watchful pursuit

suit of piety and virtue ; that so in the end we may be able to render a good account, and be deemed worthy of immortal happiness.

CHAPTER VI.

Of Predestination.

PREDESTINATION is that divine decree of God, whereby he hath predetermined, before all ages, to elect the faithful in his son Jesus Christ, to adopt as his children ; and if they persevere steadfast in their duty, eternally to glorify : but the impenitent, and those who resist his will, and continue in their iniquity, eternally to condemn. And it may be considered in a two-fold manner, according to the ancient divines—For God decreeing to call to the grace of the gospel, has a certain proposed end, viz. eternal salvation ; it follows therefore that God has made a decree concerning the salvation and condemnation of men, to which this decree of being called or elected to grace is subordinate.

In the predestination to happiness or misery, God considers men as they are faithful

faithful or unfaithful to the laws of Christ; infomuch that spiritual benediction is bestowed upon none, but in and by him; and none are destined to unhappiness but by their disobedience. Therefore our eternal fate depends upon the conditions of that new covenant which our Lord established between God and us; the former covenant of works being done away.

With respect to election, the object of predestination is the grace of God in this life, and eternal happiness hereafter: and with respect to reprobation, the object is dullness of understanding, hardness of heart, and, in the life to come, eternal torments.

The persons pre-adjudged hereby, are the faithful and the unfaithful: For so God loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son to the end that all that believe in him should have everlasting life. He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth in him. Now some who misinterpret this and the like passages of scripture, argue and object, that this doctrine of predestination is apt to beget a carnal security in the minds of those who think themselves the elect, and to overwhelm others with despair, who think they are to

be numbered with the wicked. But as the Gospel œconomy is entirely consistent with reason, so we may be certain that this prescience of God is also consistent with reason. For, no doubt, he who knows all things, who saw our substance yet being imperfect, and in whose book all our members are written, most assuredly knows, at our first entrance into the world, what course we shall take, whether we shall resist or obey his commands.

Let us be truly thankful, since we have it in our power, by the knowledge of revelation, to please God : but the obdurateness of some hearts is so great, that nothing will prevail with them to comply with the offers of salvation ; but, in spite of every effort, they rush headlong to destruction. Even the salutary discipline of affliction, conduces not to amendment ; but, like the miracles upon Pharoah, affect and soften their minds no longer than while they are present. But the objection made is this, If they are predestinated to a life of sin and unhappiness, and eternal misery hereafter, it is not in their power to act otherwise than according to their predestination. Which notion they take from the ninth chapter of St. Paul's epistle to the Romans, where the Apostle repeats the words of God to Pharoah : Even for this purpose have I raised thee up, that
I might

I might shew in thee my power, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. After six judgments that God had inflicted upon Pharoah to no purpose, he then hardened his heart, though not before ; and adds that he would cut him off with the pestilence, and utterly destroy him from the earth ; but that he preserved him alive beyond his time, raised him out of that great danger or pestilential disease that was upon the land, for no other end but to make his divine power more illustrious, and make all the earth hear of the exemplary punishment of God, in this life, upon one that had thus often hardened his heart against God. The Almighty, in shewing mercy, is not bound to render any reasons beyond his own will, so when he delivers up an obdurate sinner to the hardness of his heart, this he may do if he pleases when all that has been done in this, is not by infusing any quality in him, but by leaving that man to himself who had so often held out against God, or by inflicting that judgment on him on earth, which otherwise had been his portion in hell. Whereas to many others, who are not so hardened in sin, he continueth his chastisements, and by that means brings them to reformation.

And

. . .

And when temporary afflictions have this effect upon any, some of the fathers are of opinion, that they should be considered as objects predestinated to be called from the vices of the world; and, by patiently submitting to God's will, to be justified, and hereafter eternally glorified: as St. Paul says in the 8th chapter of his epistle to the Romans, at the 29th and 30th verses: For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate, to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified. These two verses are a figure or speech called gradation, and may be thus understood: Those whom God did predestinate to suffering as worthy of his care, them he also called to ~~suffer~~ actually, by proving them with temporal afflictions, and whom, upon such trials and chastisements sincerely endured, he justifieth, and approves as his elect; and these he either hath or certainly will glorify or reward with eternal glory.

By this we are to understand, that the doctrine of predestination, in a secondary sense, has reference to temporal afflictions, as a subservient means to eternity: by setting before mankind the folly and vanity
of

of earthly things, and giving us a foretaste of the joys of heaven.

For God, in his dispensations of mercy, often condescends to awaken mankind from a state of sinful and careless security, by some calamity or other; by which he intends that they may have a clearer discernment of the danger of their present condition; and, by being renewed in the power of the Holy Spirit, may be reformed, and have a brighter prospect before them for the future. Such mercy may be considered as a predestinated call from a life of sin to a state of holiness. In a primary sense we are to understand, that God has decreed, from the foundation of the world, to deliver some from eternal condemnation, and to crown them with everlasting bliss, as vessels made to honour; and this we cannot but own, because he knows who are his, and who will obey him: yet as the counsels of God are secret to us, let us hope and think ourselves his elect, when we find his Holy Spirit influencing and directing to that which is acceptable in his sight; let us obey the calling, that so, by God's preventing grace, we may walk religiously in good works, and at length, by his mercy, attain to everlasting felicity.

CHAPTER

CHAPTER VII.

Of the Angels.

ACCORDING to the holy scriptures, the Angels are those spiritual and immaterial beings, to whom God, in the creation, assigned heaven for their dwelling-place. And as, upon account of their nature, they are called spirits; so, from their office, they are called angels; because they are the messengers and ambassadors of the Most High. This is the common name of all rational spirits, whom God has made good, holy, just, and blessed; but their fall and apostacy has made a distinction, for they which persist in their integrity, are called good; but they which fall from their duty, are called bad.

The evangelist informs us that the Sadducees affirmed, there was no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit. But this is evidently confuted by the many apparitions of angels related in the scripture, especially in the books of Moses, that it is wonderful their existence should be doubted by any who acknowledge the divinity of Moses's writings. It is the opinion of some of the fathers, that the denial of the angels is the
next

next to Atheism; for they cannot be perceived but by their operation and office; and they are denied because they are not visible: and if that reason should prevail, by the same pretext the being of God may be also denied.

But for the Sadducees, a sect of the Jews and confirmed in the faith of the Mosaic law, to deny the angels, whose visible appearances are so often related by Moses, intimates that they were a very absurd and contradictory set of people, agreeable to the character given them by Josephus, lib. 13th. de bello, cap. 12th.

The scripture, indeed, does not plainly declare that the angels were created by God; only in the 148th Psalm, the Psalmist exhorts all, even the angels, to praise the Lord; and he also addeth the reason, for he commanded, and they were created. The title of the sons of God being given to the angels in the 38th chapter of Job, verse 7th, When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. This epithet could not be attributed to them, but with respect to their creation. Reason dictates the same; because if the angels were not created by God, then would they be independent of him, and equal with him.

G

Concerning

Concerning the time of the creation of the angels, the opinions of the learned are various, the scriptures being entirely silent on this head. Their opinion seems to be the most probable, who think that they were created before the visible world, and were the inhabitants of heaven. And this is demonstrable from hence; because it is said, the Devil seduced mankind immediately after the creation: wherefore it is manifest that the bad angels being forsaken by God, and as rebels thrown from heaven, were destined to destruction. Neither is it credible that those celestial spirits revolted from God within a few days after their creation; nor does it appear to have been the rebellion of one, but of many of the angels, nor yet the commission of one sin, but a continual perseverance in sin; as may be gathered from these texts; St. John, 8th chapter, and 44th verse; 1st epistle of St. John, chapter the 3d; as well as from their grievous and eternal punishment, to which they are, without hope of pardon, condemned.

Since, in the holy scriptures, we are convinced that there are such beings as the angels; let us next proceed to consider their power and office: and here we must observe, by the way, that since their apostacy they
are

are divided into good and bad ; I will therefore begin with the former.

The power of the good angels is very great, as we may learn from God's being called the Lord of Hosts, and by their means and using them as his army, to execute his judgment. Their power is elucidated in their stupendous and wonderful works. In the 12th chapter of Exodus, we find that a single angel, in one night, destroyed all the first-born of Egypt ; and in the army of Sennacherib, one slew an hundred and eighty-five thousand. 2d of Kings, chap. 19. An angel moved the waters at the pool of Bethesda, by virtue of which, whoever descended immediately into it, were cured of whatsoever disease they had : St. John, 5th chapter, 2d verse. And in the Acts, we read that one of those good and powerful beings opened the iron gate of the prison, and brought the Apostle St. Peter forth to his friends.

They have influence also on the senses of men, internally and externally. With respect to the inward senses, their power is manifest from the angel's appearing to Joseph in a dream. They are often sent by the Almighty to admonish and forewarn men in sleep ; and, by visionary dreams, bring to their remembrance many things

which they erroneously think and hope are buried in oblivion.

There are two examples in scripture which illustrate their power over the external senses: 1st, by their bringing a mist upon the eyes of the Sodomites, so that they could not find the house of Lot: and 2dly, of the Syrian army, that they might not behold Elisha, who was in the midst of them. But, great as the power of the holy angels is, yet it is subject to the divine will, neither can they go beyond the power given them by God.—Next I will consider their office.

Almighty God makes use of the good angels as ministering spirits. 1st. They are destined to celebrate the praises of God before his throne; thus the Seraphims in the 6th chapter of Isaiah, 3d verse, And one cried unto another, and said, holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory. Also, holy David, in the 103d Psalm, says, Bless ye the Lord all ye his angels. And in this duty they are ordinarily employed in heaven. But they are extraordinarily employed when God renders himself glorious before men, by some marvellous work; the angels then celebrate the praises of God in the sight of mortals, as we are informed they did at the nativity.

nativity. They were alway ready to perform various offices to our Lord, during his abode on earth ; for when the tempter left him, angels came and ministered unto him : and in his extreme agony there appeared an angel from heaven strengthening him. And our Saviour said to Nathaniel, Verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. And, at the end of the world, the angels will come forth and sever the wicked from among the just. They execute the judgment and will of God in various ways. Either in preserving the godly that they come not to harm, or if they happen in danger to deliver them from it. Also, to execute the judgments of God upon the wicked, as they did upon the Sodomites, the Egyptians, and Assyrians ; and upon King Herod : or by transferring the souls of the departing faithful into a quiet rest : or, lastly, by gathering together the elect from the one end of heaven to the other : and, as officers, assisting our Lord in the last judgment. Now it is much disputed . whether an angel is not assigned to every person from their birth, who is continually present to them ; and, by divine appointment, is their guardian and conductor through life. And many think that the
saying

saying of our Saviour, in the 18th chapter of St. Matthew, verse 10th, helps to corroborate this opinion. But our Lord did not speak either of age or size; but that they were little in faith. They are not called their angels because they are assigned them from their nativity, but because they were especially appointed by God as a guard and protection to them. The whole that is meant is this: that the angels in general, take care of the faithful in general. And as for the notion that every individual has a particular guardian angel assigned them, is a matter for which we have no warrant from scripture to affirm; and the investigation concerning it is more curious than useful. It may be among the means that God uses in the administration of providence, which watcheth over us every moment of our lives; and to the righteous affords particular deliverances and miraculous escapes, when to human understanding, death seems inevitable: the 3d chapter of Daniel is an instance of this, and a manifest proof of the goodness of God, who sent an angel, or, as some think, our Saviour, armed with divine power, to preserve three righteous persons from the envy and malice of their enemies; and the fire destroying those who took them up, is a signal mark of God's anger upon such as execute wicked commands,

mands, who, though the most mighty men in the army, yet had no might to escape the flame at the mouth of the furnace, when the other escaped in the midst of it. And the astonishing preservation of Daniel in the Lion's den, is another comfortable proof of God's care and love for those who faithfully worship and obey him: for the Psalmist says, the angel of the Lord tarrieth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.

Let those illustrious examples stir us up to a steadfast perseverance in religion, which will certainly render us objects of God's protection and providence here, and worthy candidates for happiness hereafter. When impending dangers threaten and terrify, or when the envy and malice of the wicked pursue us closely, yet our mighty deliverer, who is an eye witness, and knows the intents of the heart, is always able and willing to rescue us; or to enable us to endure that task of trials and temptations which he thinks fit to lay upon us: and hereafter to reward our perseverance and constancy with a brighter crown of glory. Lastly, let the information we receive from the scriptures concerning good angels, and every instance of the preservation of God by their means, make us more and more zealous in his service, until we shall have
filled

filled up the whole measure of Christian duties, and God shall think fit to translate us from this world to a better.

CHAPTER VIII.

Of wicked Angels, or Devils.

THE doctrine concerning evil angels, or devils, seems necessary to be understood for this reason, viz. their malice and hatred against God, Christ, and the church, being known; and their artifice, power, and diligence in besieging us, we may become anxious to guard against their snares and temptations; and be disciplined in those weapons which are sufficient to resist such potent enemies. And this is the end for which it is revealed unto us in the scriptures concerning these evil spirits, that the frequent instances of their artifice and cunning may put us upon our guard against their wiles and solicitations.

Since many testify, both by their words and actions, that they do not believe that there are foul spirits, or devils; or, at least, that they are not so dreadful as commonly described, I will therefore, first, shew the danger of this error, and how the
reality

reality of those evil beings may be proved from scripture and from reason.

2dly. I will treat of their sin and fall from heaven.

3dly. I will shew their power and influence over mankind.

4thly. Their manner of tempting and seducing.

First, then, I am to shew the error of those who do not believe there are such beings as devils : and this was not only an error of the Sadducees, who said there was neither resurrection, angel, nor spirit ; but at this time many are found who think that nothing more is meant by the devils than our own lusts and passions, and the depraved thoughts of the heart ; and are unwilling to believe that there are any greater enemies to human nature than the malignant dispositions of wicked men. In this error they continue until they experience the malice of these fallen angels, and are convinced that they have been too much under the dominion and influence of the enemies of their salvation. Lest these should perish in their impiety, and others should fall into the like error, let them be assured that there are devils ; that it may be proved from scripture, from reason, and from experience : that their number is great, that millions of

H those

those wicked spirits, armed with malice and envy, are dispersed throughout the earth, and engage in continual conflict with mortals; and unless we easily yield to their assaults, make our lives a state of perpetual warfare.

They are always near at hand, to take advantage of our follies and unguarded levity; and they abound in cunning and power to tempt, seduce, and betray.

The scriptures prove their being, in these and many other places: 1st epistle of St. Peter, 2d chapter, 4th verse, For God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down into hell. And in the 6th chapter of St. Jude, The angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in chains under darkness until the judgment of the great day. We read in Genesis that the devil discoursed with our first parents in the form of a serpent; that he appeared before Saul in the likeness of the prophet Samuel, at the instance of the witch of Endor. The devil, by this allusion, assuming the shape of that divine and heavenly man, induced Saul to worship him; which is the end and aim of the evil spirit to all which seek after him.

In the book of Job, he came among the sons of God, and God said, Whence comest

comest thou, satan ? And he answered, from going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. The whole of the antient book of Job, which contains the temptations and miseries of that holy man, are a sad proof of the power and existence of the wicked one. In the gospel there are many instances of the possessed of devils being relieved by our Saviour and his apostles. To these testimonies of holy writ, our own reason and experience may also be added. Whence is it that the world is so replete with very many and horrid crimes ? that many wickedly and wantonly destroy the peace and comfort of themselves and others, through ambition, lust, or covetousness ? who disregard the restraints of piety, and harden their hearts against the equitable law of human reciprocity ; or the Christian rule of doing as we would be done by ; and esteem and value nothing but the vain pursuit of those things which are not only unsatisfactory, but leave a sting behind them never to be eradicated. This is, without doubt, at the instigation of the foul fiends ; who, by tempting men to oppression, fraud, and every sort of iniquity, fill the world with those dreadful tragedies which are so often exhibited to the sight of the contemplative and serious observer. Natural reason also instructs us of these

evil spirits, from our own inward fears and feelings : and we may be assured that they are always near at hand, to tempt and take advantage.

2dly. I am to treat of their sin and fall from heaven.

Now what the sin of the apostate angels was, is not declared in the holy scriptures. And the fathers and other learned divines differ very much in their sentiments concerning it. Some think their rebellion to have been against God, because they would not be subject to the Son of God, by whom he created all things. And as this proceeded from nothing but pride, they therefore alledge pride to have been their crime ; and to corroborate their opinion they introduce this of the 10th of Eccl. Pride is the beginning of every sin : and another of the apostle, The devil being puffed up with pride, was desirous to be called God. Others think that they were filled with envy and anger because God had made man in his own image. But their reason seems the most probable and best agreeing with those texts which are commonly produced to prove it, viz. That God had revealed to them the mystery of the incarnation, and that their pride would not suffer them to be subject to one whose humility was so

great as to take upon him human nature. Certainly when this adorable mystery was manifested to the world, and God had decreed and established it by his own eternal counsels, it then became certain and unchangeable, and all inferior beings ought to have submitted to it, and rejoiced at it. The chief of the truth is this,—that the Son ought not to take upon him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham, and to become man ; and that his whole human nature should be exalted above men and angels. Their heresy and sin was, the denying and disallowing the deity and divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And our Lord himself speaks of the same thing to the Jews, when he says, in the 44th of the 8th chapter of St. John, Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do ; he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there was no truth in him ; when he speaketh of a lie he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar and the father of it. If we consider what it was that caused our Lord to return this severe answer to the Jews, we shall find it was, because they denied him to be the Son of God ; they denied him to be the Christ, the Redeemer and Saviour of the World.

Therefore

Therefore as this truth, to which the Jews would not acquiesce, was the truth of the gospel; so was it the same to which the devils would not submit and agree. The denying the divinity and deity of the Son of God, we may from hence learn, is a principal and a dangerous sin, although the Deists of the present age may display both wit and abilities in the avowal of their principles; yet every person who has sincerely investigated the divine truth of the gospel, and finds it agreeable to reason, must pity both their ignorance and sin; and every Christian who feels the mercy of that gracious covenant, must be sorry to see their fellow-creatures ambitiously guilty of a crime, for which (according to many of the fathers) the devil and his angels were thrust from heaven. Their crime, therefore, was, they would not acknowledge and obey the Son of God, as God; and chose rather to leave their first and blessed abode, than to acquiesce in the humiliating plan of man's redemption.

3dly. I will consider their power and influence over mortals; and the various ways by which they tempt and seduce us.

The evil angels have great power and influence over the body and mind. For being cast from heaven into the earth, they have
therefore

therefore no power over cælestial beings, but only over terrestrial things : and there are many instances and examples of their power over mankind, viz. holy Job, whom God permitted to be tempted and tormented for a trial of his patience and virtue. In the gospel we find they had power to enter the bodies of men, and distract their minds. But the omnipotent God has limited the power of their nature, which is angelical, although malevolent, and revengeful to God and man. Utterly averse to every thing that tends to the honour and glory of God, their continual aim is to injure and destroy the health and peace of the righteous and good ; and to keep the minds of the wicked and abandoned in ignorance, darkness, and sin. Sometimes Almighty God permits them to assault mankind in a violent and external way, that they may be examples to others in constancy and faith. But their usual method, and that by which they too commonly succeed, is by soliciting and tempting : all their temptation consists in seduction. They cannot compel the mind to sin, therefore they kindle the flame by applying certain means. Moreover they watch and observe what passion a man is most addicted to, and so apply such means as are most fitly subservient to excite that passion ; as they stirred up Judas with the
hope

hope of gain to betray his Lord : and incited holy David, through ambition, to number the people. Sometimes the devil seizes mankind in an unguarded moment, and tempts them to commit a sin to which they are generally averse. By the influence they have over the animal spirits, they are always ready to fill our minds with wicked and base thoughts ; and to raise in our fancies foolish and sinful ideas, in the contemplation of which if we indulge ourselves, we shall be ensnared in a labyrinth of sin and sorrow.

They enflame giddy youth and debauched age with lustful concupiscence, and tempt them to the commission of irreparable injuries : they stir up the ambitious and covetous, and keep them in a constant pursuit of unsatisfactory joys, until declining age, or the approach of death, bring to their recollection former sins and follies ; and they, with sorrow and remorse, look upon the retrospect of a life marked with fraud, oppression, and every species of wickedness. Satan's power in this respect cannot be doubted, for he goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, and narrowly observes our foibles and failings.

Let us keep ourselves guarded against the blandishments of the evil spirits, who, from their antient malice, darken our minds,
hide

hide the deformity of sin, and paint it in the most inviting colours. Like a deceitful enemy, with the flattery of pretended friendship, they tempt us to comply with their solicitations, and having seduced and betrayed us, they leave us to reap the fruits of misery and ruin. Let not the external charms of sin, though ever so alluring and fraught with the most promising delights, prevail with you to forsake your duty to that beneficent God who is every day conferring some new gift, or repeating some former blessing: who has endued us with faculties whereby we may enjoy this life to a great degree, and, by a conscientious obedience, we may form hopeful expectations of futurity; until the commission of sin vitiates the sense of every innocent enjoyment, deprives us of happiness, and makes our nights sleepless and irksome without the draughts of intemperance and luxury. So true is the remark of Solomon, The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear? Put on, therefore, the whole armour of God, and manfully fight under Christ's banner, against sin, the world, and the devil: and when maturity of years shall have brought you to a sense of duty, and an unfeigned sorrow for past sins produced true repentance, and you shall have arrived to the

I happiness

happinefs of a new, regenerate ftate, then beware that a compliance with fin does not deprive you of the hope of a heavenly inheritance. Remember, when you are inclined to commit fin, that it is the devil who tempts you, in order to deprive you of immortal happinefs, and make you partake with him in mifery. Refift the devil, fays St. James, and he will flee from you. May God give us fuch a portion of divine grace as will enable us to finifh the warfare of this life with peace and comfort, that, by a ftedfaft perfeverance in holinefs, we may be partakers of the kingdom of heaven, through Jesus Chrift our Saviour and Redeemer. Amen.

CHAPTER IX.

Of Providence.

HOLY David comforted himfelf with the confideration of God's omnifcience, when his enemies falfly accused him of hypocrify, as one who pretended to religion only for the fake of promoting his own ambitious defigns againft Saul, whose crown he fought to take away : he therefore appeals to God as the proper judge of the integrity of his heart, and an efpecial witness of the fincerity of his mind, in profeffing

fessing him a lover and defender of the true
 servants of God, and an hater of his
 enemies. And in the conclusion, after an
 application to have his conduct inspected
 and scrutinized, he invokes the Almighty
 to become his leader and guide to all eter-
 nity. If his thoughts and intentions had
 been contrary to his great professions of the
 love of God, he was certain that the fraud
 could not be concealed ; but being touched
 with the false reproaches of his enemies, he
 justifies himself in the sight of God, whom
 he knew was a constant witness of all his
 actions, and to whom he confesses the very
 purposes of his heart to be discernable.
 Wherefore, in the 139th Psalm, he says,
 O Lord, thou hast searched me out, and
 known me. There is not a word in my
 tongue, but thou, O Lord, knowest it
 altogether. Such knowledge is too won-
 derful for me ; it is high, I cannot attain
 unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit,
 or whither shall I flee from thy presence ?
 If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there ;
 if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art
 there. If I take the wings of the morning
 and dwell in the uttermost parts of the
 sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and
 thy right hand shall hold me. If I say surely
 the darkness shall cover me, even the night
 shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness

I 2
and

and light to thee are both alike. This Psalm contains an emphatical and joyful acknowledgment of God's immensity and providence, both which I will at this time consider.

The immensity of God is such, that he can neither be contained in any place nor yet excluded from any, but is every where present after an ineffable and imperceptible manner; insomuch that it is impossible to conceive any place where God is not. In this sense God speaks by his prophet Isaiah, Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my foot-stool. And by the prophet Jeremiah, Do I not fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.

That God is infinite, and every where present, is very evident: but the opinions of divines are various as to the particular manner of his infinity and omnipresence. It is impossible for our finite and limited capacities to understand, comprehend, or conceive it. Yet that the thing is true, that he is actually omnipresent, we are as certain as we are that there must be something infinite, which no man of consideration attempts to deny. But whether this infinity or immensity of God is to be attributed to his essence, power, or providence, is a doubt. Some think that this is not to be attributed to his essence, but to his power or providence. For they conceive that God dwells
in

heaven, as being the throne and seat of his divine majesty ; according to many texts of scripture, where heaven is called his throne. In the 115th Psalm, the Psalmist says, But our God is in heaven. And our Saviour directs us to make our supplications in these words, Our Father which art in heaven. They imagine that from this his throne of glory God governs all things, and from thence diffuses his power and virtue every where, and is present with all things ; like the sun, who every where diffuseth his light and heat by his beams. But if they allow God to be every where present by his power and knowledge, how they can deny it by his essence I cannot conceive.

Again, others more judiciously determine that the divine essence is immense. As we read in the book of wisdom, that the spirit of the Lord filleth the whole world : wherefore says the Psalmist, Whither shall I go from thy spirit, and whither shall I flee from thy presence ? From hence we may easily conjecture in what sense we are to understand the omnipresence of God : not by his power of ruling as it were by a certain quality, but substantially by his essence.

How, or in what manner, the Deity is ever present in all places and at all times at once,

once, is difficult to be comprehended, unless it be by his divine influence, as observed above. For whereas all finite and created beings can be present but in one place at once; the supreme cause, on the contrary, being an infinite and most simple essence, and comprehending all things perfectly in himself, is at all times equally present, both in his simple essence, and by the immense and perfect exercise of all his attributes, throughout the boundless space of immensity.

The use we should make of the immensity and omnipresence of God is this, that we every where conduct ourselves carefully and reverently, as in the sight of God. The belief of the omnipresence of God is the foundation of divine worship, and a great encouragement and incentive thereto; and an especial means of deterring men from sin, because they know God to be present to all, and the judge of all; therefore, upon mature consideration, they will fear to sin in the sight of him who is at once the witness and avenger of their crimes. He hears our supplications, and knows the disposition of our hearts towards him.—Psalm 33d, The Lord looketh from heaven, he beholdeth all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth.

Nothing

Nothing can be more conducive to piety and salvation than to consider ourselves always in the sight of God, and in his real and immediate presence. Remember the command given to Abraham, I am the Almighty God, walk before me, and be perfect.—As if he had said, Act in such a manner as if you imagined me present to you, and then you will lead a life worthy of my presence, and free from hypocrisy. They will be instated in the eternal presence of God in heaven, who are persuaded that in this world they are continually before him, and live under a sense of his perpetual providence : and concerning the providence of God I will now proceed to consider a few particulars.

Providence is that continued and almighty work of God by which he governs and preserves the universe and all that is in it, especially mankind. He who disallows a providence denies God, because he is known by his works ; and if they ascribe the fabric of the earth and heavens to blind chance, or to the necessary and natural law of fate, scarce any argument remains to convince us of God's existence : infomuch that the denial of divine providence is but one degree from Atheism. When, therefore, we contemplate the great regularity and uniformity of nature, and the good
which

which he causes to be produced out of various unforeseen accidents, which to us appear scarcely reconcileable with his other attributes, until the event has assured us of the contrary, and that the Ruler of the World is wise and good.

The chief means in the administration of divine providence are preservation and government. Preservation is that act of providence by which he supports the essence and faculties with which he has endued all creatures in that state which it is his will they should continue in for a certain space of time. For God gives life, breath, and all things; and in him we live, and move, and have our being.

Government is that powerful act of God by which he rules all things, for his own glory, and for the eternal good and welfare of man. It extends itself to the whole universe, inasmuch that nothing is free from the providence, the observation, and the care of God. The holy scripture testifies this, enumerating all things singly, and subjecting them to this divine law. Agreeable thereto the sun performs his course in the appointed time, that so he may communicate a convenient heat, tending to the fruitfulness of the whole earth; and fitly dividing the seasons into spring, summer, autumn,

autumn, and winter. The heavens declare the glory of God, says the Psalmist, in the 147th Psalm ; he chants out the praises of his maker in these words : Who covereth the heavens with a cloud ; who prepareth rain for the earth ; who maketh grafs to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the hart his food, and to the young ravens which cry. There is nothing in the world so vile of which God does not take care, nor so small for which he does not provide.

The inference which our Saviour teaches us to make from the universal care of God, is, that if he so provide for the smallest part of the creation, he will undoubtedly provide for man, whom he hath created in his own image. Therefore, while we do our duty, keep in God's service, and do not forsake him, we shall be duly provided for : but if we turn deserters, we run the hazard of a thousand hardships which attend our rebellious courses, and disinherit ourselves of many blessings. Let us endeavour then, as much as we can, to free our minds of all care, fear, and solicitude about the world. Let us take care to do our duty, according to the instruction of our heavenly Father ; and never in the least distrust his providence, but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all outward things shall be added unto us.

K

As

As we have encouragement to look unto God for the supply of all our wants and necessities, it should teach us to take no unworthy, sordid or dishonest course to supply our wants; but cheerfully to depend on God for that supply; and likewise to behave ourselves so, that we throw not ourselves out of God's protection, and from under the care of his providence.

Let us acquiesce in every thing that God thinks fit to bestow upon us; and be calm and resigned even when things do not turn out according to our wish; and patiently submit to his afflicting hand, considering trouble and inquietude as a blessing and a talent; being manifest tokens and indications that we are objects of his care; whom he is pleased to afflict in this world, to wean us from the joys and pleasures thereof; that we may more eagerly desire heaven, and be the better prepared for it.

How comfortably may we pass the time of our sojourning here on earth, if we only reflect that we are always under the inspection of God; and if we are careful to obey him, he will provide for us, and cause even misfortunes in the end to turn to our advantage. But we must take heed that by our sins we do not cause God to withdraw his protection from us in this world, and
 provoke

provoke him so that he will cut us off from an inheritance in heaven. If we recollect that we have offended God, let us immediately, like the penitent prodigal, repent and make our peace with him. And if we are truly sorry for what is past, and resolved to forsake our evil ways, and obey God for the future, he will forgive us our transgressions, for the sake of his Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

CHAPTER X.

Of the Incarnation.

WHEN we set ourselves seriously to meditate on the mysterious and gracious circumstance of the incarnation of our Lord, we are at once filled with astonishment and praise: our hearts exult with gratitude and joyful thanksgiving to him who, for our sakes, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost, and born of the virgin Mary.

The two great mysteries in this article of our faith, are the conception of our Lord by the Holy Ghost, and his being born of a pure virgin. And that such an extraor-

dinary event should come to pass, greatly amazed even the virgin Mary herself, as appears by the answer she returned to the salutation of the angel: How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? By this assertion she excluded all men, and therefore wondered how this should be; how she should be able to conceive and bring forth a son.

The evangelist informs us, that Mary, the virgin mother of our Lord, was espoused to Joseph; but before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Now it was the custom, in the eastern countries, for the man and woman to be espoused and betrothed to each other some time before the consummation of the marriage. Now Joseph, to whom the blessed virgin was espoused, discovering her pregnancy between the time of the espousals and the completion of the nuptial ceremony, and being a just man, and unwilling to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily: but he was better instructed by a special message from the Almighty, and acquainted that her pregnancy was caused by the influence or operation of the Holy Ghost; and that the child was to be no less than the Saviour and Redeemer of the world.

The

The manner of the operation whereby the Holy Ghost effected the human generation of our Lord is difficult for us to comprehend ; and a learned writer* informs us that this expression of the angel Gabriel is of general interpretation : The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee. Greater intelligence than this we cannot receive from the divine oracles concerning the conception of our Saviour by the Holy Ghost. The ancient fathers, who have well considered this sacred point of religion, teach, that our Lord was operatively conceived by the power and virtue of the Holy Spirit ; and they also tell us that farther knowledge in this instance is not to be acquired. For as the prophet says, who shall declare his generation : a performance so wonderfully sublime cannot be clearly comprehended or minutely described by man.

When the holy virgin thought it impossible she should conceive, seeing she knew not a man, and of herself she could not cause such conception ; the angel gave her this satisfactory answer : With God nothing shall be impossible.

From the information of the gospel, and from the doctrines of the fathers, we understand, that it was by the influence,
the

* Dr. Pearson.

the operation, or overshadowing of the Holy Ghost, who is God, that our Lord was conceived and born of the virgin Mary. And this is necessary to be believed of the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world: that whatever our original corruption may have been, or at present is, yet there is none in him whom alone God has declared to be his beloved Son, and in whom he is well pleased. No spot of sin appeared in this blessed sacrifice; the great Redeemer of the world; who, though he assumed human nature, and humbled himself to become flesh, and was like us in all things, yet was he without sin, as conceived by the Holy Ghost.

2dly. I will consider the second article in the incarnation of our Saviour, viz. that he was born of a pure virgin.

Of the holy virgin who was the mother of our Lord, we have little more recorded than that her name was Mary, that she was espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, and that she was the person of whom the Messiah was born. For thus the holy evangelist, St. Luke, relates, 1st chapter, verse 16th and 17th.—And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph,

Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

This was a name common among the Jews at that time, to which the title of the virgin is always joined, to distinguish the mother of our Saviour from other women of the same name. And this Mary was that person of whom, according to the predictions of the antient prophets, the Messiah was to be born; several of which declare that he was to be the son of a woman, and not of a man. The first promise of this wonderful circumstance, Moses relates, is uttered and foretold by the Almighty himself, in these words, The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head. But forbearing to recount other texts which testify this miraculous birth, I will mention this of Isaiah, which is sufficiently clear; Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and thou shalt call his name Immanuel. This prophecy was fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ, who was born of a pure virgin: for the evangelist relates, that when the angel was sent from God to the virgin espoused to Joseph, and informed her of her blessed state, and of her being high in the favour of God; that she should conceive and bring forth a son, and should call his name Jesus; that he was to be great, and to be called the Son of the Highest,
and

and of his kingdom there was to be no end. When she had heard the salutation, she was astonished, and said, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? but as the angel told her that the Holy Ghost should come upon her, and the power of the Highest should overshadow her; so before they were come together she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

Therefore, according to the evangelist, the mother of our Lord, as was predicted, was a virgin when she conceived; when she was with child of the Saviour of mankind; and when she brought forth her first-born son.

If any are astonished and object to the possibility of this event, let them only recollect this observation of the angel at the end of his reply to the virgin:—With God nothing shall be impossible. May we not conclude, that that Almighty Being, who gave laws to his people, out of a bush flaming with fire, yet remained unconsumed; that afforded his people of Israel a safe passage through the sea; and led them forty years in the wilderness, feeding them with the bread of heaven; that he could as easily cause a virgin to conceive, by the power and influence of his Holy Spirit.

We cannot account for many things that happen in the natural world: if, therefore,
we

we understand not earthly things, how shall we understand heavenly things? The truth of this gracious and amazing mystery, and the possibility of a virgin's conception without the concourse of a man, we cannot deny, unless we are doubtful of God's supreme power. Our Lord Jesus Christ, then, was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and therefore is called the Son of God: Lo, a voice from heaven, saying, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Though he was born of a woman, and humbled himself to become flesh, yet he remained without sin: for had he not been pure of all iniquity he could not have made our atonement, nor could he have performed that great work of redemption. This over-gracious condescension of the Son of God is the source of solid joy to all true believers, who faithfully and cheerfully close with the conditions of that covenant which secures their everlasting salvation. But it affords no delight to those persons whose pride (by the instigation of our spiritual adversary) is too great to believe and assent to any thing which is not within the reach of their understanding.—They therefore disbelieve this merciful event, merely because they cannot comprehend it.

In our present state we cannot have a clear discernment of the mysteries of God,

L

which

which are of too high a nature for us distinctly to comprehend during our abode in the flesh.

We can no more account for the daily occurrences of providence, than we can for the wind ; whence it cometh and whither it goeth we know not : no wonder, therefore, that divine things should be beyond our capacity.

Let us, with grateful hearts, be often meditating our redemption by Jesus Christ ; and be tenacious of the conditions of that covenant which will enable us to inherit cælestial joys. Let us adore and believe in our Saviour and Redeemer, who, being conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of a pure virgin, is both God and man : whose incarnation was foretold directly after the fall of our first parents, in paradise ; and afterwards by many plain and expressive prophecies, all now completely fulfilled. Every one who contemplates these things attentively, will not deny, or doubt, their truth, but admire and adore them ;—will become a pious and a happy Christian, and will be always ready to join in that angelical hymn which sounded forth the glad tidings of salvation :—Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men.

CHAPTER

C H A P T E R XI.

Of the Holy Ghost.

OUR Saviour, after his ascension into heaven, by his mediation, fulfilled his promise, in sending the Holy Ghost to assist and instruct the apostles in the promulgation of the gospel: whereby they were enabled to speak in languages to which they were unaccustomed, to cast out devils, and to do many wonderful works. And as the same Holy Spirit continues to assist and enlighten every true Christian, let us consider who he is.

2dly. His operations and offices, and the ways in which he assists us.

3dly. The means whereby his assistance may be procured.

1st. The Holy Ghost, as described in the scripture, being joined with the Father and the Son, is the third person in the Godhead, with whom he is also mentioned and joined in the form of baptism; for we are all baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Now that the Holy Spirit is not a quality or essence only, may be evinced from the

L 2

appellation

appellation of God, which is attributed to him in the scriptures; as well as from his having assumed, upon certain occasions, a visible shape. The attributes and titles which are given him can be understood only with respect to his person and office; for it is his province to teach, govern, and defend the church; to appoint apostles and ministers; and to bestow spiritual gifts. His mission from the Father and Son, proves him to be a distinct person; so do likewise his operation and office.

The meaning of the word Spirit in general is a substance which is free from matter, and endued with understanding, activity, and strength.

The Holy Spirit (according to divines both antient and modern) is a person, that is, a subsistent and intellectual being; but this is contrary to the opinion of the Socinians, who imagine that the Holy Spirit is only the power and efficacy resident in God, or derived from him: but a greater distinction is made between the Father and the Holy Spirit in the scriptures: for he is described as a person enjoying personal titles, offices, attributes, and operations: and surely these do no way agree to mere efficacy. When mention is made of the Holy Ghost, the article he, not it, is carefully and purposely used,

used, as best agreeing to a person; as for example: When he, the Spirit of truth, shall come. This stile of speaking declares the Holy Spirit's personality; and there would be no need of this expression were he nothing else but the virtue of God.

The scripture attributes personal offices to the Spirit; such a leader, a guide, a monitor, &c. he shall lead you into all truth; he shall bring all things to your remembrance: these and such like expressions do in no sort agree to divine power and efficacy only, but belong to a person.

If we look back into the old testament, we shall find that the Holy Spirit or the good Spirit of God, is opposed to evil spirits which are and must be acknowledged of a spiritual and intellectual substance; as appears from 1st Sam. 16th chap. 14th ver. The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. Now what those evil spirits from the Lord were, we may conjecture from the sad example of Ahab in the 2d of Chron. 16th chap. There came a spirit and stood before the Lord, and said, I will entice him. And the Lord said unto him, wherewith? And he said, I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. From whence it is evident that the evil spirits from God were certain persons, even bad angels.

The

The nature of the Holy Ghost may be best understood by that description in the new testament given of him by our Lord to his disciples, in these words; The comfortor, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name; he will teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, and shall testify of me: which words contain the description of a person being sent, teaching and testifying.

The operations of the Holy Ghost do not only prove him a person, but also that he is distinct from the Father and the Son. He is said to be the Spirit of the Father and to go out or proceed from him; he is therefore another from him. For though the Father be undoubtedly God, though the Holy Ghost be also God, and the same God, (because there cannot be two Gods,) yet the Holy Ghost is not the Father. For the holy scriptures do as certainly distinguish them in their persons, as they unite them in their nature. He which proceeds from the Father is not the Father, because it is impossible any person should proceed from himself; but the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father; therefore he is not the Father.

Besides divers things are attributed to the Holy Spirit which do not well agree with the Father, viz. that he descended and rested
upon

upon our Lord; I saw, says St. John, the Spirit descending as a dove, and it abode on him.

He is also distinguished from the Son, and is called the Spirit of the Son: as our Saviour himself acknowledges, in these and many other places: When the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, &c. and again, It is expedient for you that I go away: and again, I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter. These texts prove the Holy Spirit not to be the Son, but to be distinct from him.

The Holy Ghost, then, is the third person in the ever blessed trinity, proceeding from the Father and the Son, receiving divine essence from both, and equally partaking of the same Godhead, is therefore God.

Having shewn who the Holy Ghost is, I will, 2dly, proceed to shew his offices and operations, and the ways in which he assists us.

As he is the comforter, he teaches, enlightens, and comforts the minds of those by whom he is received: for the soul of him to whom the Holy Spirit is given is illuminated and he discerns more than mere mortals can. The apostle St. Peter was not present with Ananias and Saphira when they sold
their

their possessions, except in the spirit, and yet was the deceit and hypocrisy known to him, although there was neither accuser or witness. Wherefore, says he, hath satan filled thine heart to lie unto the Holy Ghost? Whilst it remained was it not thine own, and after it was sold was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

A like instance of the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit we have of the prophet Elisha, who, when he had, without fee or reward, cured Naaman the leper, his servant received the price of him; and, as he thought, securely concealed it: but the utmost darkness and the greatest secrecy cannot hide from the discernment of those who are endued with this divine gift. Therefore, said Elisha to him, Did not my heart go with thee? As though he had said, I was here indeed inclosed in the body, but the spirit which was given me from God observed and knew those things which were done at a distance, and declared the words that were spoken elsewhere. Here we may perceive how the Holy Spirit enlightens the mind, takes away ignorance, and substitutes knowledge in it's stead.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is the greatest we can be supplied with in this world. He
that

that is for us, is greater than he that is against us. Let us then keep ourselves in such a state as to afford a suitable habitation for the heavenly guest, and then we need not fear the wiles of the devil, the assaults and temptations of his angels or evil spirits, or the deceits and cruel artifices of wicked men, his agents.

The office of the Holy Spirit is both external and internal.

The external work of the Holy Spirit is apparent by the revelation of the will of God, by which mankind in all ages have been instructed in the knowledge of eternal life. For there have been holy prophets ever since the world began, who were enabled to speak the mind of God concerning things present and future: and St. Peter says, in 2d epistle, chap. 1st, Prophecy came not at any time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. In the scriptures he is called the Spirit of Prophecy, and he guided the apostles into all truth, and by them informed the world of God's gracious intentions towards mankind; and therefore he is called the Spirit of Revelation.

His office, internally, is the illumination of the souls of men; and mercifully opens
M their

their hearts so as to apprehend and receive divine truths, and if they are careful to retain his continual impressions, he then directs and governs them in all their actions, that they may perform those things which are acceptable to God.

If we live in the spirit, and are quickened by his influence, we must also walk in the spirit, following his directions. And the apostle tells us, that if we walk in the spirit, we shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh—Gal. 5th chap. 16th verse. Another office is to join us to Christ, and to make us members of that body of which our Saviour is the head. For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body—1st Cor. 12th chap. 13th verse. This heavenly monitor tempers our inclinations and affections to a ready compliance with God's commands, and a hearty resolution to do that which is pleasing to him. He also inculcates those pious and amiable virtues of soul which are requisite for our well-being both here and hereafter.

3dly. I am to shew how his assistance may be obtained.

And this is by prayer and meditation, for he is the spirit of prayer, and his assistance is procured by that : he also leads and directs us to it, because he is that bond or
union

union by which our hearts are united to God. The spiritual conjunction of ourselves with God, is by faith ; which also is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and is obtained by prayer. When incense was offered in the temple of Solomon, the glory of the Lord filled the temple : so if we offer to God the incense and sacrifice of prayer and praise, the temple of our hearts will be filled with the glory of the Holy Spirit. Let us, then, admire the mercy and gracious goodness of our God : the Father promises to hear our prayers, the Son intercedes for us, and the Holy Ghost prays in us. Let us not resist the holy impulse, but be always ready to receive this heavenly guest : and let us keep strict watch over our thoughts, words, and actions, lest our conduct be such as prevents his abode with us. And may this same Holy Spirit who inspired the prophets, and was sent to the apostles, and was, and is, directing to all Christians who sincerely desire his aid and co-operation ; may he also enable us to bring forth fruits worthy of his sacred influence : for which cause he is sent from the Father, through the intercession of the Son, to whom be glory for ever and ever.

CHAPTER XII.

Of the Trinity.

WHEN we are admitted into the rights and privileges of the Christian religion, we are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. These three ever-blessed persons constitute that benign and merciful Deity which we call God. And although the scriptures teach us that there are three persons in the Godhead, yet we are not to understand that there are three Gods, but three persons in one God. Had our Saviour, who is the Son of God, not been equal with the Father and the Holy Ghost, he would not have directed his apostles to baptize all nations in his name, equally with the other two; and if he had been inferior to them, he would not have commanded himself to be worshipped as God. For why should our Saviour desire all nations to enter into the covenant of salvation with himself and the Holy Ghost, equally with the Father, if they were not to be worshipped, as God, equally with him.

Thus in the new testament our Lord and his apostles teach us to pay homage and
adoration

adoration to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as the only one true and living God.

There is no reason why any should object to this doctrine of the trinity, since a plurality of persons in the Godhead so plainly appears by abundance of texts in the old testament. First, from these words, in the 1st chap. of Genesis, and the 26th verse, Let us make man in our own image. And again in the 3d chap. and 22d verse, Adam is become as one of us. And again in the 11th chap. and 9th verse, And Jehovah said, Come let us go down and confound their language. These texts, and many others which might be produced, clearly declare a plurality of persons. And being the words of God, we must, as St. Hilary admonishes, learn from God himself what we are to understand concerning him. We cannot be mistaken if we speak and think of God in the same manner as he himself does. Therefore, when the Divine Being speaks of himself in the plural number, we certainly cannot do wrong, if we believe a plurality in the Godhead. But it may be objected that it always has been customary for kings and great princes to speak of themselves in the plural number, no wonder then that God, who is the mighty Ruler of the World, should use this form of speech. To this I answer, that this was not the custom

custom of the Hebrews, neither does this way of speaking appear to be usual in their language; for, in the scriptures, all edicts of kings and princes are published in the singular number.

It is also imagined by some, that God might address himself to some of the heavenly inhabitants, as to the angels; when he said, Let us make man, &c. But this error is soon done away when we take notice, that man was not made in the likeness of angels, but in the likeness of God; And God said, let us make man in our own image after our likeness.

When the devil tempted and persuaded our first parents to eat of the forbidden tree, he did not say, ye shall be as angels, but, ye shall be as Gods. And after their transgression, we read in the 3d chapter and 22d verse, God said, behold the man is become as one of us. I will add one or two texts more in proof of this subject: Gen. 19th chapter, 14th verse,—And the Lord rained brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven. Psalm 110th, 19th verse,—And the Lord said unto my Lord sit thou on my right hand, &c. Thus from the holy scriptures it appears that there is a plurality of persons in the Godhead.

We may also, in proof of this, observe, that the word Elohim, which is the hebrew
for

for God, is the plural number. In the beginning Elohim created the heaven and the earth. By this we perceive that the Deity consists of more persons than one.

Now if we are, from the above citations, convinced of the plurality of God, we must consider next, of how many persons the Godhead consists; and many places of the old testament intimate and declare that they are three, and neither more or less. Psalm 33d, verse 6th,—By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and the host of them by the spirit of his mouth. Here we see that the Lord, his Word, and his Spirit, are noted to be the maker of the world. But again, in Isaiah, 48th chap. verse 16th, Now the Lord God and his Spirit hath sent me. Here also is mention of the three persons of God: one being sent, and two sending.

If we look into the new testament, there is a clear manifestation of the trinity. 1st. In the baptism of Christ, 3d of St. Matt. verses 16th, 17th. Where the Father appeared by voice, the Son in human shape, and the Spirit as a dove. Therefore we are ordered to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

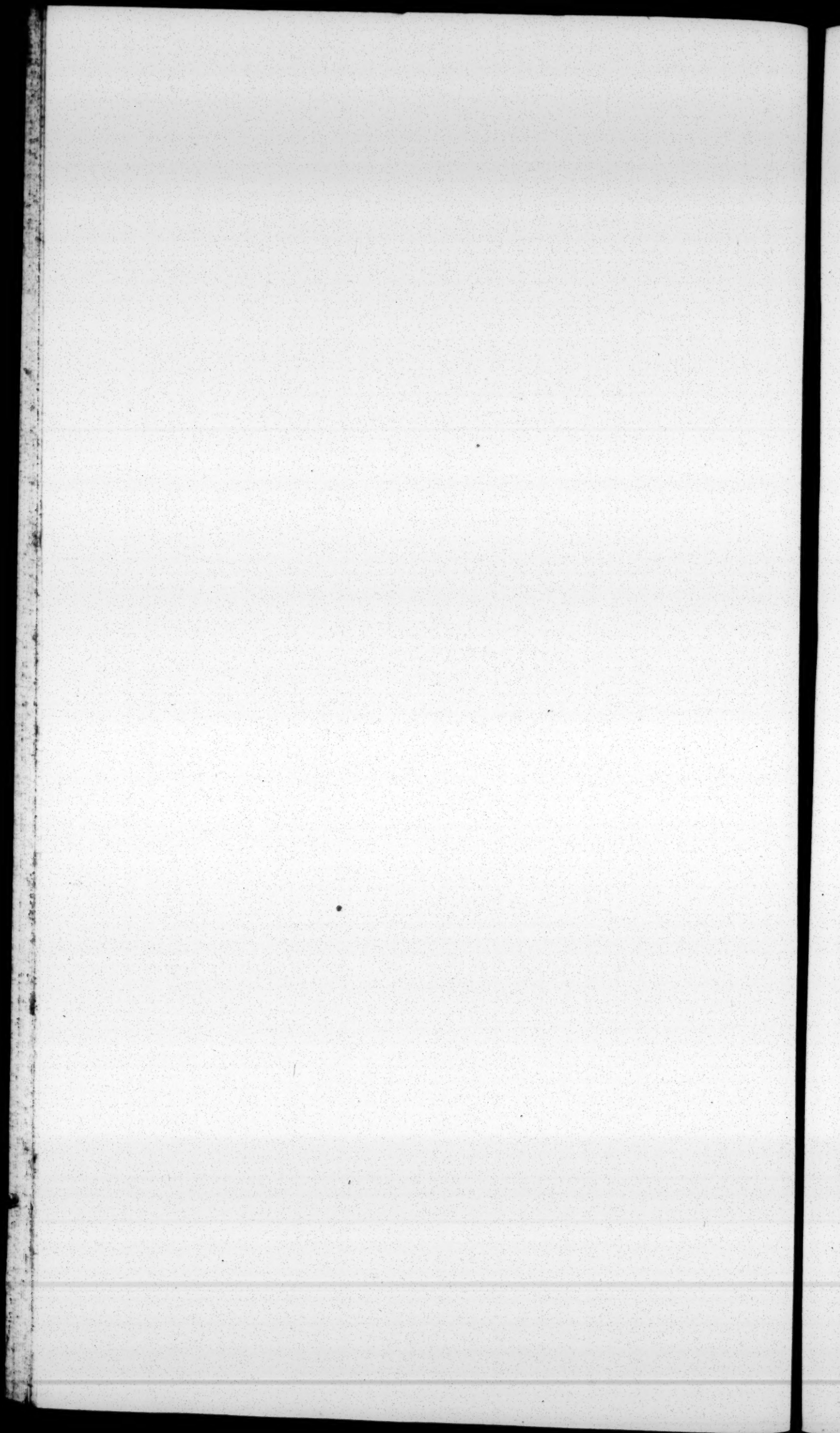
There is also a revelation of this mystery in our Saviour's sending the Holy Ghost to
the

the apostles. When the Comforter is come whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth. The three persons are here distinctly mentioned, viz. The Holy Ghost who is sent, the Son of God who sends him, and the Father from whom he is sent. St. John, in his first epistle, 5th chapter, says, There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one.

Many more texts from the scriptures of the old and new testament might be cited to confirm the truth of the three persons in one God. If therefore we believe the scriptures, we cannot fail to have faith in this important point of religion. From what we have here before us, we may infer, that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are three persons in one nature. The divine nature is the Godhead itself, and these three ever-blessed persons subsisting in that Godhead. With a little consideration the holy trinity is not so mysterious as many imagine, even in these days of our flesh, when we do, as it were, see through a glass darkly, in comparison of the manner in which it will hereafter appear to us. In the mean time let us make our prayers, and serve and obey that great Almighty Being, to whom we have engaged ourselves
by

by baptism ; and give praise and glory to
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as the only
true and living God.





P A R T II.

OF THE DUTIES OF THE CHRISTIAN
RELIGION.

C H A P T E R I.

Of Piety.

THE things which pertain to God, and his worship, are distinguished by the name of piety, or godliness : in like manner as our duty towards our neighbour is contained under the names of justice and charity : and that towards ourselves is called temperance.

It is the first of these, viz. piety, which I have here attempted to delineate. Piety by many is said (and that justly) to denote the whole Christian religion, because that is a doctrine according to godliness, and the whole duty which God requires of us, under that appellation ; according to St. Paul, who says, in the 4th chapter of his first epistle to Timothy, Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come.

In all things our duty towards God ought to be regarded as our principal end ; whom indeed we serve and obey by discharging the offices of justice and charity due to our neighbour.

Piety, or the worship of God, is beneficial in procuring the health and peace of the soul, and in promoting and increasing the reward of future glory. It is also a probable means, by our example, to bring others over to the faith and belief of those things which make for our salvation. In short, its uses are very many, and may be said to be the fountain from whence all virtues flow. Hence St. Augustine defines piety to be the true worship of the true God ; all the duties of good living being derived from it.

In piety the Emperor Theodosius placed the felicity of a Christian, and at his death recommended nothing so strongly to his sons, as that they should preserve true piety ; because from the practise thereof peace and all good things come. If happiness and comfort do not result from virtuous actions, is it to be supposed that they accompany a life of wickedness ? for that is a condition which is seldom free from internal corroding reflections, that are hard to be stifled even in the greatest profusion of
worldly

worldly splendour. But it may be objected, that pious persons are oftentimes poor and miserable, linger out their earthly course in a needly subsistence, or perhaps die for want. To this I answer, that it now and then, nay frequently, happens; but then God fully compensates their deficiency of worldly joys, by supplying them with spiritual gifts, and filling their minds with comfortable hopes of eternal delights.

True piety consists in the sincere worship of God, and in promoting his honour and glory. Also, in the love of our neighbour, having a heart always disposed to execute those offices which Christianity and humanity dictate. And in regard to ourselves, it consists in temperance, in the denial of worldly things, and in subduing our passions. St. Paul, in his 1st epistle to Tim. 1st chap. and 27th verse, says, Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

There are some who argue, that piety is inconsistent with the business and pleasures of life, which things are so necessary to our well-being here: they alledge, that it takes up too much of their time and thoughts; that it sits heavy upon the spirits, is an
obstruction

obstruction to success in commercial affairs, and renders them unfit and unacceptable to society and good company. But this plea is soon confuted, by considering the object of our piety, and the means proposed by it, and contained in it.

The object of our piety or devotion is that Divine Being who has revealed himself in the scriptures, manifested himself by his works of creation and providence, who made heaven and earth, by whose goodness we enjoy the genial warmth and fruitfulness of spring and summer, and by whose power we experience the awful horrors of winter ; it is that God who made a covenant with Abraham and his posterity, who delivered the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage, who made known his will to them in the law and the prophets, and, by the merciful act of redemption, has put it in the power of his creatures to obtain salvation and an heavenly inheritance upon most gracious terms, easy and necessary to be observed for the peace and happiness of society. The means contained in piety, and the end proposed by it, are promises of a quiet life here, and an eternal rest with God in heaven. Whatever frightful and absurd notions men may entertain of religion, and of the restraints that a virtuous life puts them upon with respect to worldly pleasures, yet

yet they are groundless and without foundation : for so far is piety from obstructing the joys and comforts of life, that it enables us to enjoy life to greater perfection. Neither does it retard the success of our temporal affairs, for it's precepts enjoin truth, justice, moderation or temperance ; virtues which not only are apt to beget reverence and respect from all with whom we have intercourse, but likewise are a natural means of prosperity and success. Moreover the practice of piety and virtue is the end we were sent into the world for, that so we may be qualified to enter upon that great and blessed estate in heaven, for which God has designed us. Unspeakable and transporting pleasures cannot fail to spring up in the minds of those persons whose conduct gives them hopes that they are in God's favour, and have a fair prospect for happiness in the other world. Unutterable must be the joys of their hearts, when they contemplate that they are soon to ascend up into heaven, to be received with congratulation by their Saviour into the friendship of the powerful Monarch of the World, to be present with and to be known by angels and archangels, and that their continuance there is to be for ever. Such meditations (which conscious innocence always produces) will dispel far off
the

the gloom of death, the fear of judgment, and the terrors of eternal misery; they make a man resigned to all the circumstances of life, moderate in prosperity, and patient in adversity.

But it is not so with the wicked, and those who seek for satisfaction and delight in temporal things, and on them bestow their attention and time. Unhappiness, vexation, and pain, are at the end of all their pursuits; and they find the highest terrestrial joys to be mixed with evil. Pure happiness is not to be attained in our present state: yet when we behold the prosperous man of the world, in whose countenance we think we can discern symptoms of comfort and content, we fondly pronounce him happy, and think him to have arrived at the height of his wishes. But if his pampered appetites have solely employed his care, and he has sought nothing higher than the gross pleasures of this world, we may be sure our judgment has been too hasty. If the service of God has not been his constant care and chief delight; if wickedness has filled up the greatest part of his time, hindered him paying the incumbent debt of praise and glory to his maker, and of preparing for futurity; if he has lived neglectful of these things, we may be certain that he suffers from the suggestions of his own mind. The judgment we pass

upon the happiness or unhappiness of others from the sanguine look of their complexion, or from outward appearances of any sort, is rash and fallacious. Alas! we know not how sad and heavy a heart many a man carries under a fair outside. Solomon says, the heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger does not intermeddle with its joy.

The very recollection that we have offended God, and neglected our duty to him, is sufficient to destroy our peace of mind: and unless it is timely repented of, and relinquished, it will embitter every earthly delight; and, at last, entirely eradicate all happiness.

True pleasure is only to be found in the walks of piety and virtue, for the thoughts and practices which proceed from their innocent dictates, leave no remorse or sting behind them. Lastly, let us observe that piety is situated in the heart, and inwardly actuates the inclinations and frame of mind; and that it shews itself outwardly by a willing obedience to serve God, to shew forth his praise and glory, and to do every Christian duty to mankind, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, the mediator of the new covenant. And may God grant that we may be partakers of the blessings promised thereby.

C H A P T E R II.*Of Faith.*

FAITH is the believing such things as reason and arguments merely human could never have made clear to us. It is the embracing with a chearful readines whatever dispensation God is pleased to make to mankind, with a full resolution to perform and practice accordingly. And of all the dispensations of religion that God has vouchsafed to the world, the Christian revelation informs us the most clearly of our duty towards God ; and upon what terms he will accept or reject us at the last day. It also directs us how we are to demean ourselves towards our neighbour and ourselves ; and if we have faith in the gracious covenant of the gospel, we are satisfied that we have it in our power so to act as to procure for ourselves an eternal blessing.

The profession of the Christian religion, without faith, will be of no avail, and will not entitle us to any of the benefits Christ has purchased for us : for not being possessed with a firm belief of what is therein contained, we cannot be said to have faith ; and our duties of adoration as not coming
from

from the heart, are not sincere; therefore not acceptable to God, or effectual to salvation.

Though faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, yet we are to proceed upon rational grounds; and therefore we are not left destitute of testimony sufficient, both inward and outward, to induce our belief. God has not left himself without witness: he testifies to the truth of what we believe, by that inward light and satisfaction we enjoy in believing. He testifies to it outwardly by those probable arguments and motives of credibility which engage the assent of impartial and considering men. So that although the object of our faith does not come to us with the evidence of sense and demonstration, yet there are so many circumstances of probability as give us the highest degree of moral assurance, and such as every considerate man must confess it unreasonable to mistrust or deny.

The faith that is required of us, is that of the Christian religion; and perhaps, from the following observations, we may think it reasonable to assent to its doctrines.

When we are convinced and acknowledge that it is the duty of man to worship and serve God according to his divine will, it is ne-

cessary that we have faith in, and conform to, the revelations he is pleased to make. The patriarchs, and those who lived under Moses's law, believed their institutions and ceremonies to be prescribed by the Lord himself; and accordingly strictly observed them. It is by faith in the Christian religion that we hope to be saved; a religion whose institutes and precepts are altogether reasonable and necessary; enjoining piety towards God, and justice and morality towards our neighbour. The things whereof our faith and belief is required are principally these, viz. that piety and virtue will gain the approbation and the favour of God, and hereafter be rewarded with eternal glory: and that sin and wickedness will incur the wrath of God; and that, persisting therein, he must inevitably be transferred into that utter darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Whoever is possessed with a belief of these things will be careful so to act as he may not be deprived of the inestimable joys of heaven, and will not permit any bait of pleasure to entice to those things for which he must hereafter pay so dear. This then is the belief to which Christianity requires our assent, faith, and practice: insuring peace and a good conscience in this life, and, in the next, a happy immortality.

CHAPTER

CHAPTER III.

Of Hope and Trust in God.

WHOEVER has a firm hope and confidence in God, endures with cheerfulness the afflictions incident to this life; and is enabled to bear the worst things that can befall him, with fortitude and patience. The troubles and disquietudes which make miserable the irreligious and profane, and cause them to sink under their burden, do, on the contrary, enliven the hearts of those who trust in God, and confirm their belief of his interposition in earthly occurrences; that a sparrow does not fall to the ground without his knowledge, and that the hairs of their head are all numbered: thus satisfied of his providence, they are contented and happy in all conditions. But as I have undertaken to explain the doctrines, duties, and precepts of the Christian religion, it may be expected that I should give you the definition of this subject.

Hope, then, in a religious sense, is the expectation of some future good, to be obtained from God, through Christ, whereby the mind is strengthened and supported in
trials

trials and temptations, the anxieties of life diminished, and faith in the divine promises confirmed. It is a principal part of religion ; for thus says the Psalmist, in the 37th Psalm, and 3d verse, Hope in the Lord and do good ; dwell in the land and feed on faith.

Next let us consider it's advantages, which are many.—Hope, and trust in God incline us to piety and devotion towards him ; and make us fearful to offend him whom we esteem our benefactor, protector, and deliverer. By the apostle it is called an anchor of the soul : for as a ship is staid by it's anchor from tempests, and guarded against rocks and shallows ; so hope preserves our souls, lest they should be overcome and seduced by the temptations or blandishments of the world. A reliance on and resignation to the dispensations of providence, produce serenity of mind, and freedom from anxiety, which exceedingly contribute to the length and felicity of life. If troubles beset us, or difficulties occur in business, both which are very common ; if either of these happen, and are within our power to remedy, the chearful resigned man sets himself in good earnest to remedy and overcome them ; and instead of giving way to a dejected despondency, does the utmost he can, by prayer and exertion, to better
his

his condition ; and not only patiently, but pleasantly, with philosophic heroism, wades through the difficulties. Whereas the man whose whole dependance is on the world, and whose trust is not in God, instead of bearing his afflictions and misfortunes with patience, greatly increases them, by his anxiety and foreboding fears.

The evils of life which are out of human abilities to remedy or prevent, are piously and calmly endured by those who wisely consider, that whatever God does is beautiful in it's season. They have a firm faith that God knows what is best and fittest for them.

Hope and trust in God is not only a duty we ought not to neglect, but also that which we should do for the sake of our own quiet and content ; it being a certain method to acquire true happiness, either in a prosperous or an adverse state. Whoever believes the existence of God, and that the world is governed by his almighty wisdom, is satisfied that whatever befalls them is by his approbation and direction : and altho' he may now be unable to reconcile the surprising events that often happen, with God's gracious goodness ; yet the time will shortly come when he will be convinced that his condition and circumstances were such as best conduces to our eternal welfare.

Let

Let us never give way to despondency of heart, but always have hope and trust in God; for that is an expressive testimony of our sincerity towards him, and therefore our worship and service will always be acceptable in his sight. For whoso putteth his trust in the Lord, mercy embraceth him on every side.

CHAPTER IV.

Of Charity.

AMONG the theological virtues, charity, although the last in order, yet is the first and the greatest with respect to it's uses and profitableness; because it is the bond of perfection, and the fulfilling of the law. Charity, or love, is that affection of the heart by which God is preferred before all things: whom the righteous and devout esteem their chiefest good and greatest joy; to whom all their desires flow, and all the thoughts and intents of their hearts are inclined.

From a consideration of the love of God towards us, we are excited to a return, and to declare our love and charity for God, by acts of kindness and affection to our brethren.

thren. The innumerable benefits which God bestows upon us, forces us to love and adore so munificent a benefactor. Wherefore St. John writes, in his first epistle, 4th chap. This is love, or charity, not that we loved God, but that he loved us.

Charity, or giving alms to those that are in want, is an indication of our love to God, and is therefore profitable to our salvation : but if it proceeds from pride and ostentation, from a vain desire of being thought liberal, it will be of no avail to us. That is true charity which springs and grows out of a true love to God, and for his sake discovers itself in acts of bounty to men ; in feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked.

But it may be said, that people may bestow alms upon distressed objects from motives of humanity only ; without any view of gratitude to God, or any desire of making a return to him for the blessings they enjoy : for it is affirmed by some that it is impossible for a human being to see a fellow-creature, languishing and pining away for want, pale with hunger, or pinched with cold, or labouring under a sore disease, and not contribute to their relief. To this I answer, that those persons who do not retain a grateful sense of God's

P

love

love for man, and have not in themselves a spirit of love and devotion to God, will have no compassion for their fellow-creatures ; their hearts are hardened against all tender feelings for distress and affliction, though present to their sight in ever so shocking a shape or direful circumstances. Infidelity and inhumanity are united companions in the breasts of the impious and cruel.

Indeed charitable things may now and then be done by some who have a prospect of worldly advantage ; but God, who knows the secrets of the heart, marks their deceit, and disdains the hypocrite.

True charity proceeds from the love of God, and shews forth itself in love towards mankind ; in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, and in making a proper use of the talents God has bestowed. A right and proper use of this world's goods, consists in distributing them (like good stewards, with reason and discretion) to the needy and distressed ; and providing and sustaining God's creatures.

Thus have I shewn you what charity is ; I will next consider who are the objects of charity.—And they are the poor in general, the distressed and afflicted of every denomination : but among them there may be a difference and distinction made.

The

The aged and infirm claim the first share in this amiable duty ; who are unable, through length of days, to support themselves by labour, and therefore must become dependant upon the provision made by the laws of our country, or the charity of the pious and humane.

The fatherless and widow, who, by the relentless stroke of death, have been deprived of the only prop and support of the family ; these should be the next in our care and concern for God's creatures : here misery, sorrow, and want abound with all possible severity ; their only joy and comfort is gone ; and they, helpless and forlorn, are exposed to the insulting world, unable and unfit to contend with and endure the united assaults of reproach, cruelty, and distress : thither then let the merciful hand of charity be stretched forth to their protection and relief. Next, let not the stewards of God, to whom he has committed the talent of riches, overlook the helpless and indigent orphan ; whose parents, by divine decree, are hurried from terrestrial scenes, and not allowed to perform for their child the fond parental duties.

Again, when sickness visits the family of the labourer, or poor mechanic, who in their better days of health and vigour can

only procure a scanty subsistence, they then become pitiful objects, and needy claimants of charity and kindness.

Since I have taken upon me to give some hints by way of exhortation, and to shew wherein this duty for the love and gratitude we have for the creator may be profitably testified and practised towards his creatures: I hope therefore it may not be took amiss, if I solicit for a set of people who are seldom thought fit objects of compassion, viz. the common beggar: but here reason and discretion should be used to prevent impositions.

First, then, the aged beggar, who, tottering under a load of years, and trembling with poverty and distress, seems to demand pity and charity from the most obdurate heart.

2dly. The poor soldier or sailor, who, in the service of their country, have lost their limbs, should never be unfeelingly spurned from the door; but we should most readily contribute to their relief, and never should we shut our bowels of compassion from them: for we must do violence to our own feelings before we can refuse to alleviate the distress of the mangled soldier or seaman.

The small relief which the poor mendicant requests perhaps may be spared without

out much inconvenience, as it is difficult to discern impositions, and hard to deny so trifling a demand to a fellow-creature, who equally bears the image of his maker, and is alike endued with an immortal soul, and for whom our blessed Redeemer suffered for their reconciliation.

Within the precincts of our own parishes we may always know who are proper objects of pity and compassion; let us therefore never turn our backs upon the poor, or with a scornful, imperious air, spurn from the door those to whom our Saviour, during his abode on earth, shewed the most affectionate kindness; left the strictest injunctions for their protection, and denounced the severest threats against their persecutors and oppressors. In the 6th chapter of St. Luke he gives this command and promise, Give, and it shall be given to you again; good measure pressed down and shaken together, and running over. For with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again. And in the 5th of St. Matthew, Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. St. James denounces this threat, in the 2d chapter of his epistle, But he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy. In the parable of Lazarus, unkind and haughty treatment to the poor is grievously reproached and dreadfully

fully punished. Let us then, as good and faithful disciples, after the example of our divine Law-giver, abound in love and charity one to another ; and in particular be always ready to assist and help those who stand in need of protection. We cannot do a more acceptable service to God than this ; nor can we shew greater tokens of our love and fidelity to him, than by beneficence to our needy brethren. St. Paul tells us, That pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this ; to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. If we truly love God we shall also love our fellow-creatures, who are his image. And as we are continually receiving innumerable and great benefits from our almighty Benefactor, let us shew forth our gratitude and thankfulness by charity, which, the apostle says, covers a multitude of sins ; so may we hope that as we have had compassion on others, God will be merciful unto us, and forgive us our sins.

CHAPTER

CHAPTER V.

Of Humility.

HUMILITY, (as St. Basil teaches,) is a virtue that proceeds from a modest opinion of ourselves ; and an abhorrence of that notion which arises from a vain esteem of our own abilities ; and in thinking others to be superior to us.

St. Augustine makes humility to be two-fold. 1st, that by which a man humbleth himself in confessing his sins, and not professing himself to be righteous. In which sense this saying of our Saviour's is understood ; Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. The other is, that by which a man is humbled by some tribulation or dejection, which he may perhaps bring upon himself through his pride, or it may be that wherein he may be exercised as a trial of his patience ; according to the 118th Psalm, verse 66th, Before I was afflicted I went astray.

St. Bernard defines humility to be a contempt of a man's own worth ; and, in his discourse concerning the degrees of humility, he

he says it is a virtue whereby a man, thro' a most perfect knowledge of himself, appears vile, and of little esteem in his own sight.

Some writers describe it to be the parent of order, of concord, of peace, of charity; and affirm, that humility is the head of all the virtues.

St. Hilary observes, that our Saviour hath taught us, that all the rewards of faith are contained in humility. Our Lord indeed has left us a striking example of this virtue, when he assumed human nature; and particularly enjoined the same to his disciples and followers, both by his words and actions. Learn of me, says he, for I am meek and lowly in heart. In the life of our Saviour we perceive a wonderful propensity to instruct and direct us to this duty: his birth, his education, his meek behaviour before his accusers, amidst the most outrageous affronts; his patient enduring the most shameful death, by the judgment of man: and, as the apostle states, When he was reviled he reviled not again, when he suffered he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.

The dignity and excellence of this virtue may be learnt from the 5th chapter of St. Matthew; where our Lord, in delivering his divine doctrine on the mount, began
with

with this saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of God. St. Augustine tells us, that by the poor in spirit we are to understand the humble.

St. Cyprian says, " This is the first entrance into religion ; and that whoever would live piously, let him think humbly of himself, not haughtily." Humility is the foundation of piety, from which it is inseparable.

What is greater wealth than humility ? what more precious can be found than this, whereby the kingdom of heaven is purchased, and divine grace acquired. The necessity of being humble is plainly declared by the answer our Lord returned to this question of his disciples, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven ? Verily, I say unto you, except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. And upon another occasion, he said, When ye shall be invited to a dinner, sit down in the lowest room. Our Lord, in this last instance, applying his discourse to the Pharisees, pressed upon them the duty of humility, and declared to them the danger of pride ; to which God is so great an enemy, that, in his ordinary government of the world, proud people are generally by one means or other abased, and brought

Q

to

to shame and contempt : and those who are low in their own sight, are commonly exalted. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. But if it does not so fall out in this life, yet their humility of mind is pleasing to God, and will be rewarded in the day of his righteous judgments.

It was a saying of one of the fathers, that humility is of Christ, and pride is of the devil. Pride is the most express image of the devil, and, as is generally supposed, was that which caused his rebellion and fall from heaven. Let us abstain from the practice of a vice, for which the devil and his angels were thrust from heaven, and is hateful in the sight of God and men ; and let us inculcate it's lovely opposite, humility : a virtue which chiefly characterized the Redeemer and Saviour of the world. Let us therefore not be backward to exercise this duty of humility, since the Son of God, a little before his death, arose from supper, and girded himself with a towel, and washed his disciples feet, giving this commandment, in the 13th chapter of St. John, verses 14th, 15th ; If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

CHAPTER

C H A P T E R VI.*Of Temperance.*

TEMPERANCE is a virtue which preserves a moderation in bodily pleasures, and restrains the ardour of those passions, which if not kept within due bounds, become brutish; and these, in scripture, are often called the lusts of the flesh.

Temperance is two-fold, viz. sobriety and chastity.

Sobriety preserves that mediocrity in the use of God's creatures so conducive to the health and duration of life, and to the vigorous exercise of those powers whereby we are to procure a subsistence. But it is impossible to prescribe general rules concerning sobriety and temperance, on account of the difference of men's constitutions. For one person being robust and healthful, is able to undertake and to be engaged in an employment that requires greater strength of body; so another, who is of a more weak and delicate frame, is fit only for a vocation that requires him to exercise the abilities of his mind, rather than of his body.

Q 2

Every

Every one ought so to use the good things of the world, of which, by the blessing of God, he is possessed, that may best conduce to their own health, strengthen their body, and enable them to perform the offices of life with alacrity. Temperance, which preserves a mediocrity between abstinence and excess, must here be our guide; and we must be aware, lest by luxury and indulgence, and over pampering the body, we depress and weaken the mind, and render ourselves unfit for the meditation of divine things. This caution our Saviour also enjoins, in the 21st chapter of St. Luke and 34th verse, Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness. And the apostle St. Peter, in his first epistle, 5th chapter, 8th verse, says, Be sober, be vigilant: as if, without sobriety and temperance, it was impossible to watch.

Neither must we feed our appetite with over nice delicacies, for that is not agreeable to the purpose of God's allowing us nourishment. This is mentioned as a crime in the parable of the rich glutton in the gospel, St. Luke, the 16th chapter, who fared sumptuously every day.

Another species of this virtue is chastity; which directs that we should not desire unlawful

lawful pleasures, and that we should be moderate even in those that are allowable. If we would practice true chastity, we must not indulge ourselves in the sight of that which is unlawful; holy David prays that God would turn away his eyes, lest they behold vanity—Psalm 119th, verse 37th. And Solomon describes the danger of not avoiding temptation, in Prov. 7th chapter, verse 6th.

We must also avoid learning obscene words, which are tokens of an impure heart; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. Indecent pictures, likewise, and reading obscene books, are incitements to lust and enemies to this virtue. Let us fly from every thing that is immodest, and be continually employed in some honest occupation or useful study: for nothing kindles carnal desires more than idleness, and is deservedly said to be the root of every impure thought, and depraved imagination. Let us frequently and ardently pray to God, that he would inspire us with his Holy Spirit, that so we may be free from vicious ideas. The frequent reading and meditating the holy scriptures, and other good books, will be very helpful to the preservation of chastity, will drive impure thoughts from the mind, and will
lead

lead us in the pleasant paths of innocence and happiness.

CHAPTER VII.

Of Contentment.

TRUE contentment is not to be obtained by the acquisition of transitory and worldly goods, as is vainly imagined by many. The soul being immortal, and of a nature exceedingly noble and worthy, cannot find happiness and peace in things so much inferior to itself. Its origin is celestial, and therefore can receive no enjoyment from vile and earthly things. Its happiness then must proceed from having conformed to the will of the Creator; and lest natural impressions, and the dictates of reason should prove insufficient for this purpose, Almighty God has declared in the gospel, what we are to do for our happiness and content, both here and hereafter. In that merciful revelation, and in an obedience to the precepts therein contained, true joy consists.

The greatest affluence of wealth, cannot afford quiet and content; because terrene and finite things cannot satisfy the soul's desire,

desire, which, being the image of God, can only be satisfied with that infinite good, from whom all that is truly desirable flows. Neither riches, nor any thing external, can produce or restore tranquillity of mind; this can only proceed from some internal cause. For by the act of death we are to bid a farewell to all things in the world; and this one reflection is a great allay to all it's short-liv'd pleasures. Often in the course of our lives do riches and good fortune forsake us, but this is always the case in death. We can carry nothing away with us when we die, neither can our pomp follow us.

Many seek for happiness and contentment in the pleasures of sense, but as they afford delectation to the body only, they are unsatisfactory; and sorrow and remorse generally follow as an immediate consequence. Corporal joys have respect only to the present world; and as the soul of man is created for higher and nobler purposes, every thing therefore that is not conducive thereto, must fall short of gratifying and producing content.

True content is only to be experienced in the walks of religion, and in a conscientious discharge of our duty to God: and whenever such pleasing reflections spring up in our minds, then we are in possession
of

of this great treasure. If we are zealous to do the will of God, and are anxious to obtain an everlasting inheritance in his heavenly kingdom, we shall but little trouble ourselves in the affairs of life, any more than necessity and prudence require. After the example of our great Master and his apostles we shall acquiesce and be contented in the station in which providence has placed us. They who live according to the precepts of the gospel, and whose chief aim is to prepare themselves for futurity, are the truly rich and happy : having their minds cultivated in the word of God, and refined from the polluting joys of the present life. Thus says the apostle, Contentment with godliness is great gain. Free from the anxiety and trouble which destroys the comfort of the ambitious, they are furnished with sentiments of a nobler sort, which they are careful to cherish ; sensible of their importance in producing tranquillity here, and of the eternal benefit that will accrue to them from such a practice hereafter.

Thus have I shewn you what contentment is, viz. that it is a quiet temper of mind, arising from the comfortable reflections of a pious life, which render a man contented and happy in any station and circumstances. I will next proceed to
shew

shew that this is a principal duty of Christianity.

He whose mind is filled with worldly desires, is continually poor. We all have enough, if we are but contented in our condition, wherein God places us. St. Paul says, He is a rich man that doth not possess much, and hath need of little. Whatever we have more than is sufficient for the satisfying nature is needless to us, who must shortly pass out of this life into another. And we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. If we do not make a proper provision for our change, we shall be poor and miserable indeed. It behoves us therefore to make a prudent use of the few years that God allows for our repentance and preparation : and this preparation cannot be made while men are full of trouble, imagining themselves in a hazardous and low condition : it must be a mind fortified against misfortune, and resolutely willing to acquiesce in the most afflictive and mortifying situation we can fall in.

A mistake it undoubtedly is to build our hopes upon the fleeting things of the present life, whose continuance is but for a season ; but it is wisdom to secure a possession of those things which are eternal.

R

That

That alone is true wealth which will be of service to us in another life. Why should we wish for greater riches than will serve for our passage? For more than competency is so far from bringing happiness, that it is often an instrument of sin; and consequently the cause of sorrow. When men have struggled and toiled to acquire a fortune, what is the consequence? Are they nearer content, or farther from the grave. It is true they can enjoy this world's goods to a greater degree than others; and are more enabled to wallow in the pleasures of sense. But this is a poor felicity; for although they have a little good cheer, and a merry life, yet as they live in opposition to God's will, they are likely to pay exceedingly dear. They that want such abundance may be as happy, and, if they have their health, have more content. A moderate estate is freest from temptations. Therefore it is best to be contented with necessities: and there is nothing besides food and raiment that is absolutely necessary. It is not abundance, but a contented heart, that will be profitable to our future welfare. Let a little suffice then, if God is not pleased to give more. For our principal aim should be to serve God and to seek the salvation of our souls. If we are anxious about the affairs of the world, we shall be discontented,

discontented, which is totally inconsistent with a Christian; whose duty it is to be happy in all the dispensations of providence; because he knows what is best for us, and what we have need of, before we ask him. He can sustain and raise us up to a comfortable station, when to our thinking all hopes of supply are vanished. Let us learn, with St. Paul, to be contented in whatsoever state we are in; and have our minds raised above the low gratifications of this world, and free from it's pollutions; and let our principal aim be to please God, and to secure an eternal rest in heaven, where there are pleasures for evermore. Let us, then, not despair or murmur at the providence of God, but be zealous in our duty to him, and we are sure to be provided for. For the Lord is our shepherd, therefore we can lack nothing.

CHAPTER VIII.

Of Consideration.

BY consideration here is meant an examination of the conscience and spiritual state. To this end God has endued us with reason and reflection, whereby we

may form and regulate our conduct according to his precepts, call our ways to remembrance, and consider how we have acquitted ourselves in the discharge of the duties God requires of us. And, in the gracious overture of the gospel, we are distinctly taught what those duties are, and assured of the final event of our conduct. But since in the midst of busy life, and of the various scenes which are perpetually soliciting our attention, we are liable to neglect this necessary duty; it behoves us often, if we would maintain our integrity and preserve our happiness, to review our past conduct, to commune with our own hearts, and consider our ways. The holy scriptures abound with texts that enjoin and advise this duty—Psalm 4th, verse 5th—Stand in awe and sin not; commune with your own heart, and in your own chamber, and be still. And in 76th Psalm, I have considered the days of old, and the years that are past, I call to remembrance my song; and in the night I commune with my own heart, and search out my spirits. The prophet Haggai also directs us thus, in 1st chapter, verse 5th, Consider your ways.

This duty of consideration, of examining our consciences, and meditating upon our spiritual state, is performed with the greatest pleasure and advantage in privacy and solitude

solitude. In our secluded walks, free from the company of crafty and busy worldlings, we may then call ourselves to an account of those things which reason and religion direct, as necessary to our well-being here and hereafter: we may then revolve in our minds the pleasurable scenes that will follow, as a reward of our good actions; and reflect upon the miseries and horrors threatened to wickedness. If the engagements of life will permit us to spend a part of the day in reviewing our spiritual concerns, either in our private walks or in our closets, we shall find it attended with the advantage of creating in us a pleasing tranquillity of mind. But if our secular affairs will not allow us this leisure, and we are so circumstanced as not to spare a short space of the day for this practice, then let us, as St. Chrysostom exhorts, not neglect it when we retire to rest. After we have offered our evening's sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving, and are laid in our beds, then ought we, if we reasonably wish to preserve peace and complacency, to sum up the transactions of the past day; to call to remembrance the sins we have committed either in deed, word, or thought; to repent of them; and also to root out of the mind every wanton thought, and every wicked imagination. Never should we suffer sleep to steal
 upon

upon us, before we have performed this necessary task. For here we can have no excuse,—the business of the day is over,—employ then a few silent moments in some such soliloquy; O soul, we have spent another day together; what good have we done in it, or what evil have we committed? have we acted agreeably to the intentions of the Creator, and preparatory to our future state? or have we, by fraud, malice, or oppression, forfeited the favour of God, and exposed ourselves to the terrors of eternal death? If, upon this self-examination, we shall perceive and recollect that we have done good, let us thank God for it: but if we have committed evil, let us sincerely repent, and pray for forgiveness; and beseech Almighty God to strengthen us with the renewal of his divine grace.

He who thus looks into his conduct, exercises many virtues; and first of piety, because he begins his examination with prayer and thanksgiving to God for the benefits and blessings of life: also, of humility and penitence, for he acknowledges himself a sinner, and grieves for his crimes: and of hope and charity, for he trusts that he shall receive pardon of God, whom, as his Creator and Benefactor, he loves and prefers above all things. He also fortifies himself against future temptations, extir-

pates

pates depraved inclinations, abolishes wicked habits, and in their stead stores his mind with virtues, and renders it tranquil and serene. This review of our lives and behaviour is better to be taken frequently and daily, than to delay it until it is imposed upon us by misfortune, sickness, or old age; and our account appears so long, and marked with the commission of so much evil, that the retrospect greatly alarms and terrifies us. It is more to our pleasure and advantage to call home our wandering thoughts, and to consider our ways, while we have some hope and confidence in God's mercy, than to defer it till the reflection of our past life drives us to madness and despair.

In our solitary hours, when we are free from the distracting cares of life, let us frequently call ourselves to account, and consider how we have acquitted ourselves in the duties God requires of us. In this retirement we may commune with our own hearts, and call our ways to remembrance, and reflect and meditate on the final event of our conduct; that so, if we are pursuing the path that will lead us to the land of immortal and unfulfilled joys, we may go on with assurance; but if we have deviated from the right way, we may retrieve our steps before we are too much entangled in
the

the bewitching allurements of vice. In this scrutiny of our conduct we shall perceive if there be any sin which we have not repented of, and shall be truly sensible of the necessity of a speedy repentance; we shall also be more apt to think of another world, and of the preparation requisite for it.

C H A P T E R IX.

Of Praise and Thanksgiving.

IF we retain in our hearts a grateful affection of the goodness and beneficence which we daily experience from the providence of God, it will discover itself in a willingness to discharge the duties of praise and thanksgiving. In imitation of the sweet singer of Israel, we shall be continually revolving in our minds, and recollecting innumerable instances of the divine favours; like him, we shall remember his wonders of old, and meditate and muse on all the works of his hands; and shall say with the Psalmist, Bless the Lord, O my soul! and forget not all his benefits. But that we may always have a proper sense of God's mercies, I will, in this chapter, shew that

that the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving is of right due to God, and which we are bound to discharge.

Reason and equity exhort to this duty, for we are beholden to God for all the blessings and enjoyments; and praise and thanksgiving are, as it were, a kind of return for his benefits, which cannot otherwise be made than by the sacrifice of our lips, and proceeding from gratitude. They who neglect this duty, defraud God of that right which he has justly acquired by his kindness and bounty to us; they also obscure his glory, not attributing to him the honour due. Such slight provokes the Almighty to withdraw his loving mercies from them, and to bestow them upon others who are less unworthy; as our Saviour told the Jews, in the 21st chapter of St. Matt. verse 43d, Therefore shall the kingdom of God be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

Praise and thanksgiving is the most noble disposition of mind with which we can be affected, because it declares our gratitude to God for his benefits; none of which are indeed small, but for the greatest of them we can make no other return than by confessing them with heart and voice, and being thankful for them. Hence, says holy David, in the 116th Psalm, What reward
S shall

shall I give unto the Lord for all the benefits he hath done unto me? I will receive the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will offer to the Lord the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

This duty is very frequently, in the holy scriptures, mentioned among the chief and most acceptable offices of religion. For thus we read in the 51st of Isaiah, 3d verse, The Lord will comfort Zion, he will comfort all her waste places, he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord, joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody. One great means whereby we may be induced to render thanks and praise unto God is the consideration of the worth and multitude of his benefits. It is from him we derived our being, and every provision made for our well-being; who also hath created us with immortal souls impressed with perspicuous characters of his own divine essence, and capable of acting agreeable to his will, and consistent with the innate and revealed knowledge of the future life. God is not only our creator, but preserver; for in him we live, and move, and have our being.

Although great and many are the divine blessings and mercies which we daily and
hourly

hourly experience from the divine goodness, yet the joys and delights which God has promised to those who love him and keep his commandments are much greater and more ineffable. The great apostle of the Gentiles, that he might commend the excellency and magnitude of cælestial happiness, says, That eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things that God hath prepared for them that love him.

Gratitude requires not only that we are sensible of the benefits conferred, but also a faithful retention of them in our memories; and consequently frequent reflections upon them. It requires those who fear God to be always thankful to him from a consideration of his works, which are always just and good, although not always agreeable to flesh and blood. For it is the duty of a Christian not only to give thanks to God in our prosperity, for the riches of his mercies, but also in adverse circumstances, which are ever highly distasteful to our natural senses, viz. for sickness and disgrace, and for all the troubles and disasters of life; for these we ought to be truly thankful, because we are deemed worthy of the Almighty's paternal correction. To be filled with chearful thanksgivings in a prosperous state, and to withhold the praises of God when we are visited

with any calamity, is inconsistent with the profession of the gospel.

For as we are bound to return thanks for our food, and all the blessings of life ; so are we obliged to be thankful for such corrections by which our senses are refined and our manners improved. As the late learned and pious Dr. Barrow observed, " Whatever is graciously designed, and " proves conducive to our good, is fit " matter of praise and thanksgiving." For thus says St. Paul, Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, &c. God thoroughly knows the bent and inclination of our hearts, and therefore he dispenseth to us accordingly. We should most of us gladly embrace riches and power, little aware of the anxious cares and dangerous temptations to which they would expose us. The pleasures which they enable us to enjoy, are spurious ; they corrupt our minds, and intoxicate our fancies with vain and unsatisfactory joys ; and make us apt to forget our heavenly Benefactor. But calamity of any sort purifies and refines the wit, teaches us to know ourselves, gives us a clear perception of the brevity and vanity of all earthly things, causes us to acknowledge our dependance upon a Supreme Being, and forces us to have recourse to him for help. Whatever makes most for our real good we ought to

to be thankful for ; and poverty and affliction make men pious and wise ; the former of which is said to be the mistress of wisdom and invention. When is it thought that Job was in the most happy and satisfactory frame of mind ? when he had many camels, and flocks of sheep, and herds of oxen ? or when he uttered with his voice, The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away ? Most people would be inclined to think the former to be the happiest state of mind. But neither of the two extremes of life which he experienced could prevail with him to renounce God, and his duty ; for he was neither elated in prosperity, nor dejected in adversity : in the severest of his sufferings his mouth was filled with the praises of his Maker. Even when the wife of his bosom blamed him for retaining his integrity, he answered, Shall I receive good at the hand of God, and shall I not receive evil ? In communion with his friends he ceased not to extol the praises of the Almighty ; who, (says he) commandeth the sun, and it riseth not, and sealeth up the stars : who alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea : who maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south.

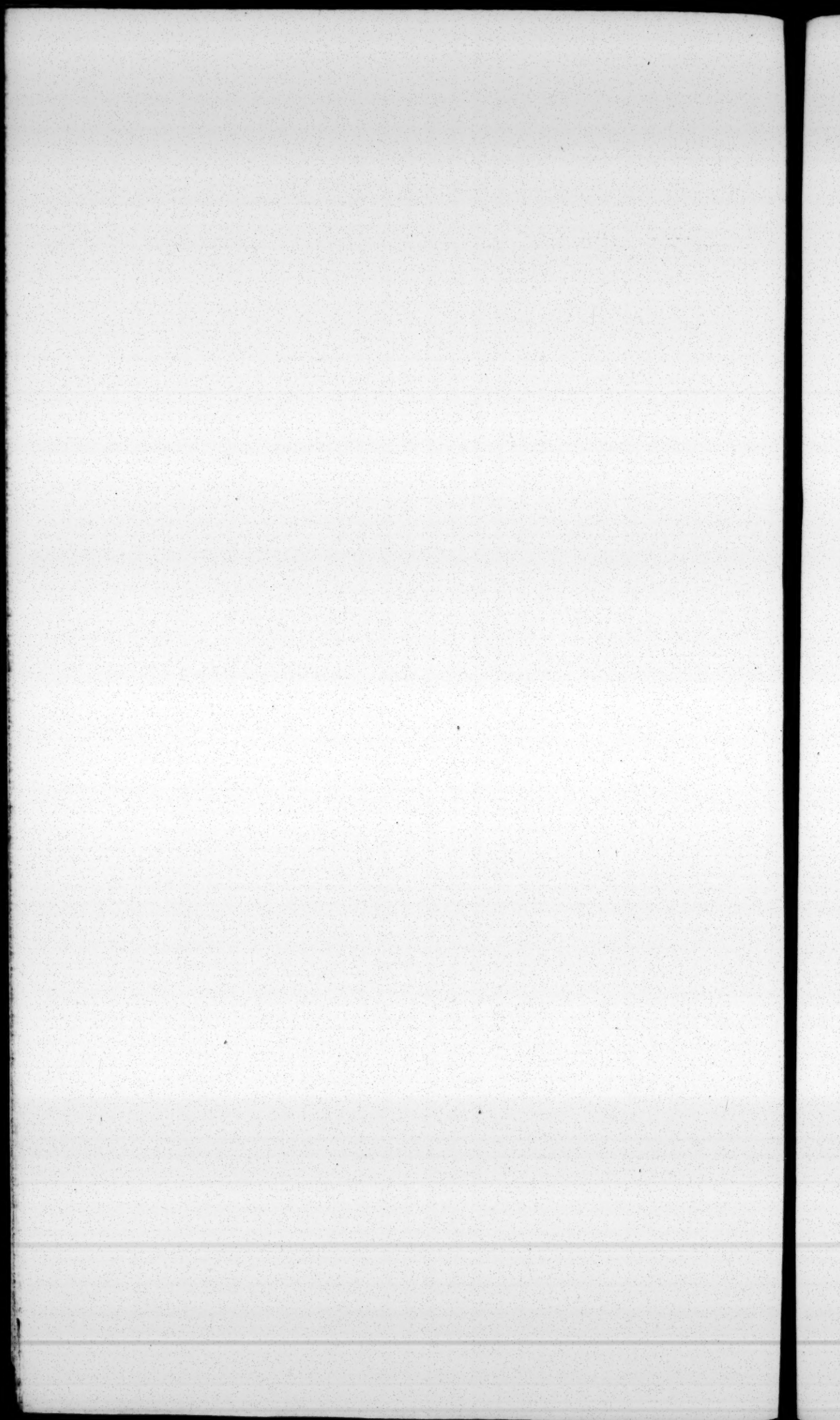
If poverty and adversity give us a disrelish
of the short-liv'd joys of the world, and
excite

excite us to pursue more earnestly the purer delights of a good conscience, and are profitable to our salvation, they then, consequently, as highly merit our thanks as much as affluence and abundance. It may be imagined by some that I have made an unsuitable digression from the subject in hand, by proving that we ought to be thankful for afflictions; but in this respect I have the example of many writers who have done the same, especially the ancient divines, who assert that afflictions are the medicines of our souls; and that they are arguments of God's good-will, instruments of virtue, comfortable presages of future glory, and therefore fit matter of praise and thanksgiving.

Another reason why we should be thankful to God for visiting and afflicting us, particularly with adversity, is this; because riches and plenty expose men to many dangerous temptations, and are apt to swell them with pride: for often, instead of filling the heart of the possessor with gratitude to God, they become the means of wickedness and vice; and, by intemperance and luxury, oaths, imprecations, and curses are more frequently heard to fall from their tongues, than either praise or thanks to God for the mercies he showers down upon them. One would hardly imagine such conduct possible

possible, did not experience but too well confirm the fact. If riches and plenty have this effect upon us, it is more preparatory to our future happiness not to abound in this world's goods; but, if it please God, it is more suitable to be blest with a mediocrity; or else to be in scanty and low circumstances. There are, it is to be hoped, many examples of piety and goodness among those who abound in wealth; and, on the other hand, it is to be feared that there are many instances of vice among the poor, and those who are destitute of the blessings of life.

No frame of mind, no temper of soul, can be more pleasing to God than a heart gratefully sensible of his blessings and bounties; and no duty or office of religion more acceptable to him than the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Let us, then, constantly begin and end the day with prayer and praises to our Maker; that so, by a pious life, we may abolish the fear of death, and instead thereof have our minds filled with lively hopes of a happy immortality, of a blessed resurrection, and an everlasting inheritance with saints and angels in heaven; for innocency of manners, and obedience to God's commands, will enable us calmly to resign ourselves into the eternal night of death, in hopes of awaking to joy unspeakable.



PART III.

OF THE PRECEPTS OF THE CHRISTIAN
RELIGION.

CHAPTER I.

Of the Love of God.

GOD, who is the chiefest good, must necessarily be loved ; and if we have either honour or gratitude we shall fulfil this command as perfectly as corrupt nature will allow. We shall love God for our creation, preservation, and, above all, for our redemption ; for in those things he has richly displayed his love towards us ; daily conferring some kindness upon us ; and, upon our repentance and amendment, forgiving us our trespasses.

The love of God is the more excellent, because while we were sinners Christ died to save us—Rom. 5th chapter, 8th verse. And his innumerable benefits bestowed upon every one of us, individually, should excite us to love him again; and should convince us of our obligations to him. We should

T love

T

love

love him for those cælestial and future goods which he has reserved in heaven for us, to the full consummation of which, upon our stedfastness in his service, he will admit us at the great day of account.

I will now proceed to shew, first, what the love of God is : and, taken in a strict sense, it is an earnest desire that those things which are pleasing to God may be done both by ourselves and others ; that so we may obtain his favour and acceptance.

It is the property of love to wish an union with the beloved object, to study to resemble it, and carefully to avoid whatever may be unacceptable, and dissolve the connection. If therefore we love God we shall strive to please him, by imitating him in acts of charity and kindness to each other, and by fulfilling his divine will. Now it is the will of God that we should keep the commandments he has enjoined ; that we should faithfully discharge the duties which his laws require, both towards God himself, and towards our neighbour. St. John, in his first epistle, chapter 5th, and verse 3d, says, This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And in the second chapter and 5th verse, he says, Whoso keepeth his word, in him is the love of God verily perfected : that is, he hath the true sincerity of love.

The

The keeping God's commandments is the plainest testimony of our love to him ; and we read in the 20th chapter of Exodus, that he will shew mercy to thousands of them that love him and keep his commandments. This, then, is the true love of God, viz. to fulfil his pleasure, to perform the duties he requires, to render the honour and glory due to him, and to return thanks for the blessings of his providence. And if we are thus affected with zeal towards God, we shall always be happy in his service, and readily acknowledge that his worship should possess the chief place in our thoughts and time, and should be the leading principle of all our actions : in imitation of David, in the 42d Psalm, As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God ; when shall I come and appear before God.

In the 6th chapter of Deuteronomy, Moses, delivering the divine ordinances, says, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength. And our Saviour tells us this is the first and great commandment. In this precept of the love of God, all Christian perfection consists ; as the fathers and divines, both antient and modern, dictate : they affirm it to be the most eminent

of all virtues; and that there is nothing that more elevates and ennobles the mind, and improves it's faculties, than this cælestial passion of the love of God. It raises and refines our understanding, by freeing them from the base mixture of sensual corruptions; it restores our distempered minds, and lifts us up from the dejected condition to which our guilt has reduced us, to the high and happy state of the blest above.

But lest any should be deceived by imagining themselves affected with the love of God, when perhaps they are destitute of this excellent virtue, or at least not affected as they ought, I will mention a few indications, by which every one, in an impartial survey of himself, may know whether the true love of God be predominant in his heart. The first sign or indication is a contempt of the world, and of all things in it; for the love of the world is enmity with God. The world offers to us things carnal and present: but it is the will of God, that by denying carnal and temporary things, we should seek those which are spiritual and future. The love of the world is contrary to the love of God, and the one extinguishes the other; neither is it possible for both to subsist in the same man: and our Saviour says, Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Either

Either terrene things will be preferred to cælestial, or cælestial to terrene. It is expressly taught in the scriptures, that the love of God is inconsistent with the love of the world and carnal pleasures; thus says St. John, in his 1st epistle, 2d chapter, 15th verse, If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. He, therefore, who prefers sinful delights to the keeping God's commands, in him the true love of God is not.

The second indication is, the joy that arises in our minds when we ourselves fulfil the will of God, or when we see others act agreeable thereto; or, on the other hand, it is an hearty contrition for having offended God, and an unfeigned sorrow for the transgressions of ourselves and others; and with such love was holy David possessed, in 119th Psalm, 136th verse—Rivers of waters runned down mine eyes, because they observe not thy law.

Another testimony of our love of God, is an ardent zeal for his honour and glory, which discovers itself when we hear his sacred name wantonly blasphemed. If, upon an examination of our hearts, we find ourselves to be possessed with these or the like indications, then may we be certain that our heart is right with God.

The

The answer of our Lord to the young man in the gospel, (who though he had abstained from gross impieties,) convinces us of the love and regard we ought to bear to God, and that no other object ought to come in competition with him. And if we properly considered the goodness of God towards us, we could not be otherwise than affected with reciprocal love. His kindness and compassion for man is infinite and unbounded; which way soever we turn ourselves, we behold instances of his love and favour; we behold the earth teeming with the richest exuberance; the wide expanse of heaven decorated with lights for our use and convenience; his providential care in sustaining us through this life; and his unparalleled goodness in prescribing laws, by the observation of which we may gain admission into the blessed mansions of eternal rest. Surely such instances of love and favour merit a return of regard and obedience. And when a person is thus affected he must feel such transports of joy spring from the operations of divine love, as will cause him to renounce the empty and low satisfaction of life, and make him more earnest to fit and qualify himself for the felicity of the future state: let us not fail to shew forth this act of obedience, but be careful to perform it; as it will
render

render all other duties acceptable to God and delightful to ourselves.

CHAPTER II.

Of the Love of our Neighbour.

TO free us from all doubt concerning the proper objects of our love and compassion, our Saviour, in the 10th chapter of St. Luke, has clearly pointed out who they are, and who is our neighbour, towards whom we may exert ourselves in the humane and social virtues of kindness and charity. For in the parable of the man who fell among thieves, our Lord has taught us that every one who stands in need of our assistance and relief is our neighbour, whether he be a friend or an enemy, a relation or a stranger. His principal aim was to shew that every object of our mercy is our neighbour, and whom God commands us to love our neighbour as ourselves. How contrary was this doctrine to that of the Scribes and Pharisees? How contrary to the sentiments of many even at this day, who live for themselves only, and care for none other in the world, being not in the least moved or concerned for the success or sufferings of others.

Some

Some imagine that they fulfil this command if they help and assist their kindred. Others esteem those as their neighbours, or at least as the proper persons of their kindness and regard, of whom they expect a return for their favours ; but the poor, who are incapable of making such restitution, are disregarded. But if we desire to comply with this precept enjoined by the law, and confirmed by the gospel, we must consider every one as our neighbour to whom we have it in our power to do good ; or, which is the same thing, we must consider ourselves as neighbours to all that stand in need of our charity and assistance. Thus we understand who is our neighbour. I will, in the next place, shew what is meant by the love of our neighbour.

The love and kindness which we shew to others with a view of emolument and profit, is not that which the law and the gospel require. It is the duty of man to love another, as being partakers together of the same human nature : and it is the duty of a Christian to embrace and rejoice in every opportunity of doing good to the members of Christ's body. In the 15th chapter of Deut. 7th and 8th verses, God has given this commandment, by Moses ; If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren, within any of thy gates, which the
Lord

Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thy hand against thy poor brother. And again God speaks thus by his prophet Isaiah, in the 58th chapter, verse 7th, Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thine house. And our Saviour charged his disciples, saying, This is my commandment, that ye love one another. The love of our neighbour, therefore, consists in acts of benevolence, in assisting and relieving others when we see them poor, distressed, and in want of the necessary comforts of life ; and, like the good Samaritan, in alleviating their miseries. When our poor neighbours are labouring under the pressures of poverty, or when any calamitous accident befalls them, then is the opportunity for us to exert the tender feelings of human nature, and to discharge the duties of the Christian profession.

Next I will consider the necessity of this command.—By natural instinct it seems that man has a feeling and compassion for man. The weakness of our nature provokes us to love one another, and convinces us of the need we have of the help of others ; and are prompted by a sense of our own insufficiency to give relief to the needy.

U

But

But again, God has made all mankind of one blood,—Acts, 17th chapter, verse 26th. And for that reason he wishes us all to live as brethren, children of the same common parent; that so, by this natural tie, we may be led to practice mutual love. Our neighbour is endowed with the same common nature with ourselves; he is the express image of us, a copy drawn by the same divine hand; of the same original; another self; though perhaps attired in a different garb, yet there is nothing else different in him from what we are, or may be: he has an equal right to the privileges of human nature, the protection of the laws, and the blessings of religion: he, as well as ourselves, has God for his friend, benefactor, and preserver; and he has an equal claim and chance to the glories and joys of heaven. We also are all of us regenerated by the same word and spirit, and in hope of the same salvation; children of the same Father, and members of Christ's body. This love and charity for our neighbour is commanded by our Saviour and his apostles. This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. And this precept he established by his own example. Lastly, let us consider the advantages attending this duty: and we shall find that the discharge of it answers a three-fold purpose. 1st. By
it

it we fulfil the commandment of God; which is sufficient, without any other argument, to recommend it: for to please him is our chiefest good, and therefore ought to be our principal aim. 2dly. By it we benefit our neighbour, or those whom accident and chance present as the objects of our charity and compassion: and sometimes, perhaps, by an opportune and momentary relief, we may conduce to the prolongation of life, and thereby afford a longer space for repentance and preparation. 3dly. By it we mitigate and quiet those painful sensations, which few can help feeling at the sight of miserable and suffering wretches. We must offer some degree of violence to the finer feelings of nature, before we can turn a deaf ear to the cries of the afflicted: and must very much harden our hearts before we can (like the priest and levite) regardless and unmoved pass by severe instances of misfortune and distress. How comfortable is the reflection of having raised the drooping spirits, and strengthened and renewed the languishing body, of a brother, a fellow-creature, and a fellow-servant of God? How pleasing is it to recollect having done good? how joyful to remember and to review instances of our compassion? to see often the memorials of our kindness and beneficence? persons whose existence (under

U 2

God)

God) is continued by pious humanity ; whom a harsh word or a refusal destroys ; for withdrawing charity, and refusing succour to the needy, they are immediately plunged into the utmost hunger and want, and finish a miserable and painful life in the bitterest distresses. No ingratitude should force us to assume the hard-heartedness of the priest and levite ; but allowance must be made for the illiterate carriage of those who are destined to labour ; their reason being uncultivated, and their manners unrefined. The greatest indignities and injuries that were offered to him whose disciples we profess ourselves to be, could not drive him from his purpose of doing good. For our Lord himself perfectly practised this precept, which he enjoined his followers ; he condescended to live in penury and want ; to endure a sore travail ; to suffer a painful death, for the salvation of mankind. And in the gospel he hath declared, that the love and mercy of God will be denied to those who have neglected and refused to shew mercy to their neighbours. Let us, then, take the hint of the good Samaritan ; bind up the broken in heart, and heal their wounds ; and be always disposed to lend an helping hand to lift the poor from their distress : and consider every one as our neighbour, and ourselves as neighbours, to
all

all whom we can assist. And, as our Saviour advised the lawyer, let us do likewise. And never turn our backs to any poor man, and then the face of the Lord will not be turned away from us.

C H A P T E R III.

Of Private Devotion.

NONE who are sensible of their own wants can need to be informed what prayer is, or of the necessity of it. If we are only convinced of the existence of the Supreme Being, from whose unlimited bounty we receive all the blessings and necessities of life, then our wants will excite us to pray, and teach us what to pray for: therefore I shall say but little on this subject.

Prayer is an argument of our own inferiority and want; for those to whom we direct our prayers we acknowledge to be our superiors: we confess that we cannot have what we pray for without such assistance. Now as we depend on Almighty God for all the necessities and comforts of body and soul, for health, and even for life itself, it is most reasonable then that our addresses to him should be frequent. Prayer is an acknowledgment

acknowledgment of God's sovereignty and dominion over us ; it is an especial act of religion, because by it the greatest honour is attributed to God. That Almighty Being to whom we pray, we suppose to be omniscient, hearing all the prayers that are put up to him in every part of the world, understanding their secret pious resolutions, and knowing the necessities and wants of all his creatures. This confession the apostle made in the 1st chapter of the Acts, verse 24th, Thou Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men. In a strict sense, prayer is only the petition of those things which are necessary and convenient for us : but if a greater latitude is taken in the definition of it, (as commonly is,) it also consists of praise to God for his mighty and glorious works : of thanksgiving and gratitude for the numberless benefits we have received from him : of faith in him, because we know him to be able and willing to grant our petitions, and, upon our forsaking sin, to pardon and forgive according to the gracious promises of the gospel.

2dly. I will shew the necessity of prayer. —Our daily wants, the weakness and infirmity of our nature, and the imperfection of the present state, sufficiently evidence the necessity of this duty ; and the blessings of providence which we continually experience
should

should lead and animate us to the practice of it.

It is a duty we owe to God, who is our maker and benefactor; and is enjoined in many places of scripture by Christ and his apostles. For thus says our Lord, in the 7th chapter of St. Matthew, and 7th verse, Ask and it shall be given you. And St. James says, in the 4th chapter of his epistle, verse 2d, That we have not because we ask not. The reason why we are commanded to pray to God for his help and protection, is not because he is ignorant of our wants and weakness; for, as our Saviour says, he knows what things we have need of before we ask him. But the principal end of prayer is that we ask and receive, and thereby preserve a proper sense of our dependance upon God, and of our obligations to reverence and obey his laws.

If, therefore, we hope to celebrate the praises of God in heaven, and hereafter to join with the cælestial inhabitants, it is necessary then that we prepare ourselves by frequent and devout communion with God in this life. To live in the neglect of this service is (as may properly be said) to live without God in the world. Let me exhort you to put up your prayers to the Almighty at least at the two stated seasons of morning
and

and evening, which the pious and devout have always judged as the fittest and best for the discharge of this duty : and for your constancy in piety, may God give a blessing to all your honest labours and endeavours ; and after this life ended, may he (as a reward of your obedience) admit you to the possession of eternal glory.

CHAPTER IV.

Of Public Worship.

IN our private addresses to heaven, it is not requisite that regard should be had either to time or place ; as such addresses cannot be too frequent, and may every where be performed, according as the disposition of our soul dictates : and for this private communion with God, we have many examples in holy writ. The Psalmist thought every place fit for this duty, and even the hours dedicated to sleep : and says, in the 63d Psalm, 6th verse, When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. Nothing could deter the prophet Daniel from making his petitions to God three times a day ; and our Lord, who regularly attended the service of the synagogue, nevertheless often withdrew from his

his disciples and followers, for the purpose of private prayer.

But although all times and places are fit and convenient for private or family devotion, yet it is not so in regard of public worship,—a duty which implies an assembly of people, who cannot be supposed to meet together without previous notice. In the 12th chapter of Deut. verses 13th and 14th, God commanded the Israelites that they should not offer their burnt offerings in every place, but only in the place where he had chosen, there should they offer their sacrifice, and do all the other sacred rites that he had commanded them. The duties of public worship require such circumstances of time and place as are most suitable to such actions, and which render the offices of religion most devout and edifying. Now churches being set apart peculiarly for divine service, have the above-mentioned advantages in them. For the church being free from secular affairs, dedicated and used only for the performance of sacred duties, becomes the house of God, a place wherein he delighteth, and where he is pleased in a more especial manner to attend to the supplications of his people.

That we are more immediately in the presence of the Divine Majesty in consecrated buildings, is clearly evident from the

X commandment

commandment which God gave Moses to build an ark, and a mercy-seat ; for thus we read, in the 25th chapter of Exodus, verses 21st and 22d, And thou shalt put the mercy-seat above upon the ark : and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. And there will I meet with thee, and commune with thee, from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubims, &c.

After the various journeyings of the chosen people, and the ark was at last fixed in the magnificent temple of Solomon, God was pleased to express his approbation in these words, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication that thou hast made before me. I have hallowed this house that thou hast built, to place my name there for ever. Therefore, though Almighty God is every where present, and every where hears the petitions of those who sincerely pray to him, yet, since he has declared it to be his will that there should be places dedicated to his honour and service, we have good reason to believe that in them we have a nearer and closer communion with him. I will now shew the obligation incumbent upon all Christians regularly to attend the church or house of God, and publicly to join in prayers and praises to him, in that form of worship which

which the wise compilers of our Liturgy have prescribed.

As we all best know the value of any blessing in the want of it, so were we, like the primitive Christians, destitute of a place of worship, we should then be sensible of the worth of sacred buildings, and rightly esteem the happiness we enjoy in the peaceable exercise of our most holy religion. But these blessings, great as they are, are but little regarded by many; and being common favours, are in a manner overlooked; which nevertheless does not in the least diminish their worth and excellence. Whereas the first establishers of Christianity would have thought themselves arrived at the completion of all their wishes in this world, had they (like us) without the dread of torture, persecution, and martyrdom, been allowed the public practice and profession of that religion, the merciful proposals of which they were determined to embrace and publish at the expence and hazard of their lives and fortunes. Yet notwithstanding the threats and cruelties of the Jews and Heathens, the Christian religion prevailed; and in a few years after it's first delivery greatly increased, by the indefatigable care and courage of those divines, who upon that account, as well as for their exemplary lives, have been honoured with the title of the fathers of the

church. The doctrines which those pious worthies taught, were free from every human invention ; were not defaced or blended with pagan superstition or idolatry ; but their hearers were taught to know that the real and true worship of God was in the heart and affections. The empty shew of those ceremonies which in a few ages after were super-added by man, and containing only an outward form of religion, are since, by the reformation, happily and entirely abolished : so that at this time it must be acknowledged, by all who impartially speak the truth, that our church liturgy, and public worship, is a most reasonable service. The articles of our faith seem consonant to reason, and the precepts of religion are such as tend to our moral and eternal good. And since in this more happy age we are not, by the dread of persecution, deterred from publicly joining in the duties of our profession ; if therefore we now neglect the worship of God, it must be owing to our own indifference, negligence, and sin : and the advantage we lose by our absence is not a little, because God has promised that where two or three are met together in his name, he will be in the midst of them.

There are many repeated instances, in scripture, of the near communion of God with men, and his more merciful attention
to

to prayers offered to him in places purposely set apart for his service. The shekinah and glory of the Lord which shone round about the mercy-seat, the gracious answer of God to Solomon at the dedication of his temple. These and many other proofs which I could produce are sufficient to assure us, that the Divine Majesty is more immediately present in these hallowed houses ; and they are also an argument of our obligation to attend the public duties therein performed.

If, (as is really the case,) God in the scriptures has commanded us to pay our public homage to him with the rest of his congregation, in some appointed place sacred to his honour and glory ; then our happiness and welfare, (if not in this yet most assuredly) in the future life greatly depends upon our regard for, and attendance on, the public worship. This is the way we testify our respect for God, and shew our desire to serve him. Nothing should hinder us praising and praying to God publicly at the stated times, and on the day he has set apart for that purpose. It is a duty that ought to be second to none ; but all other things should give place to that. It is an unpardonable crime to make religion subservient to secular affairs : to suffer any engagements to put us by paying the honour due to God : but to let any trifling cause, such as visits, business,

business, or company, prevent our attendance upon him, intimates that we are willing to serve God only when we have nothing else to do. Many absent themselves from public worship when they have no engagements, and in idleness waste the precious sabbath,—the appointed time for pious purposes,—instead of employing it in prayer and meditation;—a method that would be beneficial to their present comfort, and profitable to their future welfare.

Eternal bliss is of such great consequence, and is what most wish and desire to obtain, though all do not earnestly contend for it: it is a prize which none will be above accepting. The high and low, the rich and poor, all hope to be saved at the last great day; and they can hope for salvation no other ways than the means the scriptures prescribe. If we refuse to honour and serve God, we must not think that he will reward us for our disobedience. That covenant into which we were entered at baptism, wherein the merciful proposals of salvation are made, will be of no avail unless we obey and perform the conditions of it. As the reward is great beyond all conception, surely our endeavours ought to be proportionable. Our homage to God should be the primary object of our lives; for if we make the duties of his service subservient to things of
lesser

leſſer moment, we offer an affront to him : and ſuch hypocritical religion he will not accept, becauſe it is a plain teſtimony that the heart is not rightly affected towards him.

In order to pleaſe God, and to be accepted by him, we muſt prefer his concerns to our own : we muſt be zealouſly diſpoſed for ſpiritual and divine duties, and with a chearful alacrity always ready to join in his worſhip and adoration ; after the example of the holy Pſalmiſt, who ſays, I was glad when they ſaid unto me, let us go into the houſe of the Lord. Let us, in imitation of the royal prophet, always be inclined to tread the hallowed courts of the Lord with religious joy, and come before his preſence with thankſgiving ; remembering that then we have a nearer acceſs to him.

Did the neglecters of public worſhip conſider the obligation incumbent upon them to pay this due debt to God, none would think themſelves too great to join in it, none too buſy to attend, none would prefer temporal engagements to ſpiritual duties. Our buſineſs at church is to prepare ourſelves for another world ; to be reminded of future ſcenes that will ſoon take place ; and to beget in ourſelves habits that will remain comforts to us when the body ſhall be no more.

more. In fine, our attendance at God's earthly tabernacle is to qualify ourselves for his worship in heaven. These are some of the reasons which make public devotion a duty so exceedingly necessary. Let us not refuse to tread in the smooth and pleasant paths of salvation which our Lord and Saviour has taught and directed. Let us be careful to make a proper use of the gracious means afforded us for the obtaining a cælestial inheritance: that by frequenting the public service of the church, we may here find the way to eternal happiness. And when we are convinced of the divine comforts of religion, we shall say with the Psalmist, O how amiable are thy tabernacles, thou Lord of hosts. May Almighty God, in mercy to human infirmity, be pleased, upon our repentance, to pardon and forgive us our sins; and, upon our prayers to him, may he grant us his grace to assist and direct us in all our doings; that so we may be free from uneasy reflections of conscience, and have good reason to entertain comfortable hopes of a happy immortality.

CHAPTER

CHAPTER V.*Of Repentance.*

REPENTANCE and penitence being commonly understood to mean the same act of religion, therefore I will not trouble you with that nice distinction between the two words, which many insist on; as it is not in the least necessary for my present purpose.

Repentance or penitence is a grief and sorrow which is caused by the recollection and acknowledgment of sins committed; which induces a person, through fear and apprehension of merited punishment, to grieve for his condition, to be sorry for his offences, to desire forgiveness, and to set resolutions of living better for the time to come.

The humble confession and knowledge of guilt are necessary ingredients in repentance; for if we do not know and confess that we are sinners, we shall neither be aware of our danger, nor seek for pardon and forgiveness. Few sins are committed inadvertently; for we generally know at the very instant that we are doing wrong: this knowledge we cannot entirely root out of the mind,

Y

and

and though conscience may for a while sleep, yet it will not always ; but at one time or other it will attack us, and disturb our peace in such a manner, that all the delights and pleasures of the world cannot give ease or relief. We are then led to confess our offences, and to make earnest prayer for pardon. For how can we be said to repent, unless we confess that we have done amiss, and condemn our conduct as wicked.

This humble confession of sin is required in many places of scripture. He who confesseth, and forsaketh sin, findeth mercy. If we confess our sins, says St. John, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. If we do not acknowledge and confess our sins, how can we either hope or expect pardon. But if we believe and dread the sad denunciations of God's wrath against the impenitent wicked, we shall then confess our sins, and have our souls filled with much sorrow for them, and be highly displeased with ourselves for our folly. Holy David's grief for his sins was so great, as to water his couch with his tears. And in another place he said, I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me. If this grief and sorrow proceed from the thoughts and apprehension of having offended God, who is just, merciful, and good, and who judges both the quick and the dead, we shall not
strive

strive to conceal our sins, but shall make humble confession, and earnestly pray for pardon.

In order to effect true repentance there must be an entire change of the thoughts and behaviour, from evil to good ; which change, in scripture, is called the renewing of the mind, and the regenerate state. Thus St. Paul exhorts the Romans, 12th chapter and 2d verse, Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind. In the old testament this precept of repentance or reformation is enjoined under several names and words, though all of the same import : as in Ezekiel 14th, Repent, and turn yourselves, &c. Joel, 2d chapter, verse 14th, If ye will return and repent. And in the 3d chapter of Matthew, the baptist we find began his ministry with exhortations to this duty, saying, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Now to repent, in the Greek language, signifies, to be wise after a person has perceived his error : and in the scripture it signifies, to recover himself from the dangers of sin, and to reinstate himself in God's favour.

Without good resolutions of amendment, and of forsaking former evil habits, repentance cannot be sincere. It is not sufficient that we are sorry and grieve for our sins, but

we must forsake them, seek for pardon and forgiveness, and pray for the assistance of God's grace. When the prophet Nathan reproved David, and laid his sins before him, he did not in the least defend or excuse himself; but cried out in the bitterness of his soul, I have sinned; and thereupon composed the 51st Psalm; full of heaviness and grief; he bewails and laments his fall, and prays to God for the comfort of his Holy Spirit, that it might create in him a new heart, and new purposes of amendment of life. Lastly, let us consider the end of repentance, which is no less than the remission of sins. A good life being the fruits of repentance, so pardon and forgiveness is the reward;—a reward renewed and confirmed by our Lord and Saviour, upon terms and conditions far more easy than were contained in the old covenant; and which, when he was raised from the dead, he commanded his disciples to publish to all the world, and in his name to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins.

CHAPTER

CHAPTER VI.

Against Swearing.

IN handling this subject, I will describe the nature and lawfulness of an oath taken upon serious occasions : and 2dly, I will set forth the heinousness of the sin of common swearing, as declared by the word of God.

There is but little occasion to be profuse in speaking of the nature and lawfulness of oaths ; or in representing how far they are allowable, and in what cases, because scruples of this sort are not near so common as blasphemy and profaneness. But, however, for the satisfaction of some, I will say a few words concerning it.

An oath is the invoking God as a witness to the truth of what we say ; and it is justly reckoned the strictest bond and tye amongst men ; as indeed it ought to be ; for if we swear falsely we expose ourselves to the curse and vengeance of God. It is also a principal part of religious worship and adoration ; for by it we appeal to the Almighty as the searcher of our hearts, we own him to be the Sovereign Lord and Governor of the World, we acknowledge him to be omniscient,

scient, and the avenger of perjury and falshood: an oath, therefore, when seriously taken and rightly circumstanced, tends to the glory of God; because we confess his supreme power, his providence, and knowledge over all human affairs, and that we cannot appeal to an higher or a greater being.

Oaths are necessary to civil government, the administration of justice, and the peace and welfare of community. They are also necessary for finding out and clearing the truth in doubtful and controverted matters, and this law of taking them in such circumstances was instituted by God himself; as we read in Exodus, 22d chapter, verse 11th, —Then shall an oath of the Lord be between them both, that he hath not put his hand unto his neighbour's goods; and the owner of it shall accept thereof; and he shall not make it good. The apostle, in Hebrews, 6th chapter, and 16th verse, says, That an oath, for the confirmation of men, is the end of all strife. They can give no greater assurance of their faith and sincerity; therefore they ought to be believed that they mean as they say. To call upon the Divine Being to testify to a falshood, or to invoke him who knows the thoughts of the heart, as a witness to a thing which at the very time they intend not to perform, or are indifferent

different about, is a great proof of a profane, atheistical mind: or at least that they have renounced all love and fear of God. Some sins may proceed from a forgetfulness of God, and may be sometimes inadvertently committed; but a solemn oath is generally administered and taken deliberately: and thus to appeal to God to cover our vile hypocrisy, is a defiance to his power and omniscience. We cannot be too collected in this act of religion, whenever necessity requires that it should be administered unto us. God, who is every where present, privy to our intents and imaginations, assuredly knows whether what we are about to depose be true or false.

Oaths are divided into two kinds, viz. assertory and promissory.

An asserting oath is made use of to confirm the truth of what we assert; that those to whom we address ourselves may give credit to what we say. This is seldom taken only in the courts of judicature, when, without any prevarication, we should be very circumspect in regard to truth, because men's lives and fortunes are concerned.

A promissory oath relates to something to come, and requires the present sincere intention to perform what we promise; and also our care and endeavour afterwards to
act

act according as we have promised. This is generally taken upon admission to an office; when the person solemnly swears that he will truly and faithfully execute that office. Some respect, therefore, should be had to this solemn act of religion; that so those who enter upon public offices may carefully discharge all the duties of them. Not to regard this part of divine adoration, and to be careless and indifferent in discharging those offices which we bind ourselves by oath faithfully to perform, is a manifest perjury, and a great affront to the majesty of God: also to swear to any circumstance rashly, maliciously, falsely, or wantonly, is a wicked deceit which endangers the property, or reputation, or perhaps the life of an innocent fellow-creature. So cautious ought we to be in the truth of what we swear to; this method being the greatest assurance we can give of our sincerity; a method not only allowed by the Almighty, but even instituted by him, for the peace and satisfaction of society; and not intended to be abolished (as many think) by these words of our Saviour, Swear not at all—Matthew 5th chapter, 34th verse. For as the religion of an oath was observed under the Jewish œconomy; so our Lord, who came not to destroy the law or the prophets, he therefore did not design to forbid

forbid the use of them with regard to their primary institution; but only to dissuade the Jews from using an equivocal form of swearing in their ordinary discourse; a practice common amongst them in the time of our Saviour. If then, the Jewish custom of swearing by any of God's creatures was sinful, certainly then the taking the sacred name of the Creator in vain, and invoking him, upon ordinary and trivial occasions, must be an heinous offence. Almighty God, by his own voice, has declared, that he will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. Our Lord, in his sermon on the mount, enjoined his disciples to observe plainness, simplicity and honesty in their conversation; and forbid that extravagant talk, which to gain credit with the hearers, required to be backed with an oath.

The too frequent use of oaths in common discourse, makes them less esteemed and regarded upon solemn and important occasions; and destroys that good effect they would otherwise have in preserving the peace and safety of community, and for which they were instituted.

This act of religious worship should only be made use of when necessity or the public good requires it; and not to confirm the truth of vain and rash things; because it

Z

is

is an appeal to the most high God, who is too mighty to be called upon at people's humour and passion, and is a just avenger of those who make a mock of him, and take his name in vain.

Is it fit or reasonable that man, who depends upon God for all the blessings of nature, and by whose goodness and bounty alone he subsists; is it that he should trifle with or make light of that great and good being? Some pretend that they do not swear with a desire or an intention to commit sin, for that the oath is only used as an expletive. But what a great crime and high affront is this against the Almighty, to substitute the name of the glorious God to fill up or ornament our empty talk! Consider who it is, that is thus rashly and wantonly invoked; the great and terrible God, who made heaven and earth, and all that therein is; who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters, and spreadeth out the heavens like a curtain. Certainly then, upon a little deliberation, we shall judge it not right, thus to use his sacred name for the idle purpose of swelling (or as is vainly thought) of adorning our conversation.

Did the common swearer observe what he was saying, he must think himself highly sinful, to treat the Creator of all things in
such

such a servile manner as to invoke him at all times to curse and condemn whom he pleases. Now they who accustom themselves to this practice, are for the most part very ignorant, or else men of dissolute and debauched lives, and abandoned principles. Do we ever see a person of a cultivated understanding, and delicate sentiment, make use of such dreadful imprecations, which so often fall from the mouths of the profane vulgar? Do we ever see a truly honest and well-disposed man, thus rashly flying in the face of his Maker, and appealing to God as a witness to the truth of what he affirms? No, he has more regard to his own veracity and credit than to advance any circumstance that needs to be corroborated with an oath: and he is too cautious, and has too much reverence for his heavenly Benefactor, ever to call upon him through wantonness or passion.

It is the debauchee, and the man of no principle, who thus adorn and swell their discourse with loud imprecations or fashionable curses; who wish to be thought courageous and gay; and to acquire the name of wits: whereas the oath is the chief substance of what they have to say; for without it their discourse is flat and insipid; and with it, it is an offence to the wise and good, who are able enough to comprehend the ideas of

others delivered in faithful words, without the help of thundering oaths.

The mind of that person who habituates himself, and perseveres in this practice, must be filled only with ideas of the gross things of this world ; unmindful of another life ; unmindful of the joys of heaven ; and regardless of the power of the Creator on earth ; who can, if he pleases, upon our sin against him, consign both soul and body to utter destruction.

But was this custom of profane swearing not declared a sin, or expressly forbid in the word of God, (as we know it is,) yet still it cannot be reckoned an accomplishment ; if it be, it is such an one as the meanest man alive may make himself master of ; as it requires neither genius nor learning. And I am happy to say, that at this time it is generally discountenanced by persons of polite and refined manners : but is still too common among the lower classes ; who, (I hope,) commit this unnecessary sin thro' ignorance, and for want of being reminded of it's magnitude and fatal consequences. From this imperfect attempt I have here made, I sincerely wish that those who accustom themselves to this silly, yet dangerous sin, may be admonished of it's hatefulness in the sight of God. This sin produces

duces neither pleasure nor profit ; answers no purpose, except that it is a method of venting passion ; and in excuse for which nothing can be pleaded more than custom. All sin indisposes us for spiritual duties ; but this is worse than other sins, because it is a defiance to the Almighty, and entirely disqualifies us for divine worship. For how can a person appear before God in prayer, if a little before he has been trifling with or blaspheming him ? Let me exhort you, for the salvation of your souls, henceforward to forbear the commission of this ridiculous, but dangerous sin : and whenever an oath shall inadvertently escape you, recollect the heinousness of the offence against God, and pray for forgiveness and the renewal of his grace ; so that by being circumspect in your thoughts and words, you may, by the help of God, in a little time be entirely free from a vice which exposes you to certain and inevitable destruction. And by leaving and forsaking it, you may, with comfort, meditate on the glorious reward promised to the obedient in the life to come.

CHAPTER

C H A P T E R VII.*Of the Sacraments.*

OUR Saviour, by his humiliation and suffering, has freed us from the performance of earthly sacrifices; and, in compassion to our infirmities, has established a covenant upon more easy conditions; so that we are no longer occupied in the numerous duties, which were types and shadows of the one great sacrifice, whereby the whole race of mankind is redeemed. Eternal glory is now made over to us, upon the observance of a very few solemn rites, indispensably necessary for our salvation, and altogether easy to be performed; for Christ's yoke is easy, and his burden light.

Baptism and the Lord's-Supper are the two sacraments which our church, from the authority of scripture, has enjoined the observance of, as having been instituted by our Saviour; and which, before his ascension into heaven, he commanded the apostles to teach all nations.

CHAPTER

C H A P T E R VIII.*Of Baptism.*

BAPTISM is that ceremony by which we are admitted and entered into the privileges of the Christian Church: and by the outward sign or sprinkling with water, according to the form of the new covenant, we are assured of God's gracious intentions towards us, of the forgiveness of sins, and of eternal salvation: and on our part, we are bound to live in faith and obedience to the divine precepts. Under the Jewish œconomy, they who were converted from idols to the worship of the true God, were usually baptized or dipped in water; signifying that they had forsaken the service of molten images, the works of their own hands; and that they would for the future observe and perform the ordinances of the living God. John the Baptist, by divine command, practised the same ceremony among the Jews, whereby he represented the degeneracy and corruption of their manners, and that they had as great need of repentance and amendment as the idolatrous nations.

This custom of baptizing at the entrance on a new state of life, our Lord enjoined
his

his disciples ; and that they should practise it not only among the Jews, but among the Gentiles also, with the addition of his own name, and of that of the Holy Ghost. Go ye, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

In the Catechism we are taught, that in a sacrament there are two parts, viz. the outward visible sign, and the inward spiritual grace. Now, the outward visible sign, or form in baptism, is water ; in which the whole body formerly used to be immersed and washed ; but as infant baptism is generally now practised, whose tender age, and sometimes weakness or sickness, could not endure to be plunged entirely in the water, without manifest hazard of life ; therefore the custom of sprinkling has wisely been introduced, and justly esteemed, for the above reasons, to be equally acceptable to God, in order to obtain the gracious benefits proposed in this institution, viz. the remission of sins, and the assistance of divine grace.

This outward act of baptizing with water, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, is an authentic sign or seal to ratify and confirm the promises of God to us, and our engaging to
perform

perform the duties which he requires. But it may be objected, that children are unable to observe and perform the conditions of this covenant; and therefore the benefit, however great, cannot be obtained by infant baptism. To this I answer, that as we are all sprung from that unhappy pair, who, by their disobedience, had forfeited God's favour; we, therefore, by nature, have within us those seeds of iniquity which will be productive of many sins and much wickedness; but, by the sacrifice and covenant of Christ, are all washed away in baptism: for we then are regenerate and have entered upon a new course of life. This is the entrance into that faith and covenant by which we hope to be saved, and to inherit the blessed promises of a happy eternity; and as the uncertainty of life is so great, it is deemed prudent for us to enter into this covenant, by sureties, in our infancy; that so, if any should not live to renew this vow made for them, and to confirm their christian faith themselves, they may, as having the seal of baptism, and being children of God by adoption, be partakers of the glories our Lord has purchased for them by his passion. The privileges and benefits of this covenant, which we enter into with God at our baptism, are very many; the promises and rewards

A a glorious,

glorious, and great beyond our conception; and the conditions and obligations merciful and easy. Let us therefore diligently strive to fulfil and perform this vow and covenant, which we have so solemnly engaged and undertook to do: for if we neglect our parts thereof, we forfeit our right and claim to the inestimable benefits; we cannot hope for pardon of our sins, and for the favour and acceptance of God. Being unworthy members, we lose the comforts and assistance of the Holy Spirit, and the great blessedness of being partakers with Christ hereafter. Let us, with thankfulness to God for his tender mercies, persevere with faith and assurance in the gospel, and look forward in hope of being received as faithful soldiers and servants of our Lord Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER IX.

Of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

THIS holy rite was instituted by our Lord at the feast of the passover, at the end of which celebration, as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to his disciples, saying,

faying, take, eat, this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, faying, drink ye all of it, for this is my blood of the new testament, which is fhed for many for the remiffion of fins. In St. Luke thefe words are added, Do this in remembrance of me.

Now, firft, I will fhew the nature and design of the institution of the holy facrament. 2dly, The neceffity of frequent communion.

First. Our Lord, who knew that all things which were fpoken of him by the prophets were now accomplished, efpecially commanded his difciples to commemorate his approaching paffion by partaking of bread and wine, as representations and figns of his body which was fhortly to be broken on the crofs, and of his blood which was to be poured out and fhed for the remiffion of fins. This facrament, like the covenant of baptifm, was to be the general fign and feal of thofe who hope for falvation by means of that form of worfhip our Lord has prefcribed. As Almighty God appointed the pafchal fupper, that the Jews might perpetually remember the great favour and deliverance which they experienced in Egypt, when the firft born in every houfe of the Egyptians was flain: fo

our Saviour instituted this ceremony as a deliverance from sin and the wrath of God. Wherefore he says, this is the new testament in my blood. This do ye as oft as ye drink it in remembrance of me. But here we may take notice that our Saviour did not mean that the bread and wine was indeed his very body and blood, (as some erroneously think,) but only representations thereof; and for ever to be received as signs and memorials of what he has done for us. The doctrine of transubstantiation is so contrary to reason, and to the institution of our Saviour, and so little believed among us, that I shall not trouble you with any observations about it. Upon account of the frailty of our memories, who are apt to forget the greatest benefits, our Saviour therefore ordered, that when we come together for the worship of God, we should partake of bread and wine, as symbols and tokens of his death and passion, and of the mercies obtained thereby, in the remission of sins. And this receiving of the bread and wine is called the outward part or sign of the Lord's supper.

In every age and nation it has been customary to commemorate great benefactions and mercies by some instituted rite or other. Even the heathens had feasts in honour of their heroes and demi-gods. And in the
holy

holy scriptures we find that Almighty God has revealed his will to mankind in a way suitable to our capacity ; and has delivered unto us invisible and spiritual things, by certain visible corporal signs. So he was pleased to confirm the covenant and promise made to Noah, with the sign of the Rainbow in the clouds. To Abraham he confirmed his promise by the external sign of Circumcision. The Israelites were enjoined to keep the Passover, in order to preserve the memory of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. The unleavened Bread was commanded to be eaten, to remind them of their hasty departure. And in the new testament, our Lord, by his invisible power, relieved and cured diseases of every kind, by the invisible laying on of his hands ; and restored the dead to life, by the word of his mouth. Also, in the oblation of himself for the sins of the world, he appointed Bread and Wine to be the visible signs to perpetuate the memory of his mercy ; that so the receiving the holy communion may impress upon our minds a continual remembrance of the great and infinite benefits he hath obtained for us by his sufferings. This then is the covenant or new testament in Christ's blood, viz. that God will give pardon of sin and eternal life, upon condition of faith
 and

and repentance ; this he seals to us in the sacrament ; and on our part we must perform the conditions, by partaking of the sacred elements as he has commanded.

And thus have I shewn you, as plainly as I can, the nature and design of this holy institution.

2dly, I will shew the necessity of frequently attending this duty ; and that the plea of unworthiness, from the misinterpretation of St. Paul's text, is invalid.

One particular respecting the necessity of frequent communion is, that it is the especial desire of our Lord himself : Do this, says he, in remembrance of me. This was the only proper act of worship which our Saviour enjoined, and was the last he gave in command to his disciples : for now being about to be offered up for the sins of men, and by his death and passion to procure eternal salvation upon easier terms than were ever before proposed, he requested this particular thing of them,—that they would remember him by the observation of those things which he had appointed. This request, so gentle and easy to be complied with, ought to have great weight with us. This last command which our Saviour has imposed upon us, then about to suffer for our sins and iniquities,

iniquities, and to procure for us innumerable blessings, should excite us with ardent affection to join in the holy ceremony.

If our Lord had enjoined many costly and laborious rites, yet we ought to have observed them without murmuring, considering what of his own free will he has done for us. But instead of putting us to any trial of love and obedience, by the institution of a number of ceremonies and sacrifices, he has delivered us from that bondage and yoke, which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear, and in their room, besides baptism, he has appointed but this solemn rite for us to observe; a solemnity not in the least troublesome or laborious, but altogether easy to be complied with. But again, if gratitude for the tender mercies of Christ will not move us to a compliance with this duty, yet we shall do well to consider that it is a positive command, and which we are bound to obey, if we wish and intend to fulfil the conditions of the covenant we made at our baptism. How can we profess Christianity, if we neglect the principal and chief part of Christian worship? We are glad to embrace the gracious and benign proposals of the gospel; but if we do not conform to them, what reason have we to hope for advantage? Our Lord has plainly and expressly declared,
in

in the 6th chapter of St. John, 53d and 54th verses, that except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you, Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him.

From the repetition of the same thing, though emphatically expressed in the different words, we may be assured that the mystery contained in them is very important, which mystery is the communion of the body and blood of Christ. He is the atonement for our sins, and if we neglect to feed upon him here, that is, to observe his institution, we shall be excluded his glory hereafter.

Initiated into Christ's covenant, we hope and seek for salvation by it's salutary precepts and directions: we esteem baptism, private adoration, and all other rites and ceremonies, to be indispensibly necessary; and above all, the sacrament of the Lord's supper. Why, therefore, should we neglect the principal condition? Our Saviour is our expiatory sacrifice; whose gracious intentions we must commemorate; whose injunctions we must obey, by partaking of
those

those symbols and tokens which signify his body and blood, before his death and passion can beneficially be applied to us.

By the observance of this duty we receive remission of sins, and are made partakers of the kingdom of God : but by the neglect of it we lose these advantages ; we are yet in our sins ; and become liable to eternal death and misery. If, then, the receiving the holy communion is indispensibly necessary to salvation, let us by no means omit it. It is not left to our choice whether we will do it or not, but it is a strict command, and which we must obey if we hope to be saved. The common excuse which most people make is, that they are unfit and unworthy, and therefore afraid to communicate ; that hereafter they intend to reform and improve ; and when they find themselves more religious, and more zealous towards God, then they will attend this holy solemnity. But the sacrament is allowed on all hands to be a most likely means to bring us to repentance, to inspire us with pious thoughts, and to procure the assistance of the Holy Spirit. It is the opinion of many learned men, that St. Paul, in his epistle, does not mean, that we should be assured that we are in a state of grace and in the favour and friendship of God, before we come to the holy communion ; it is sufficient that we

B b

repent

repent, and earnestly desire to obey the motions of his heavenly grace : for if none are to receive the sacrament but those who are pure and free from all sin, our communions would be less than they are now.

By receiving unworthily, the apostle signifies, those who do it with irreverence and indevotion, regardless of the institution and of the end for which it was ordained : and he severely reproveth those he wrote to for a practice which, instead of producing spiritual profit, exposed them to the vengeance and wrath of God. Preparation for this duty is undoubtedly necessary ; but in general we should at all times be circumspect with regard to our own behaviour ; and willing, when occasion requires, to forgive the affronting and injurious behaviour of our neighbours. And although we are unworthy of this gracious benefit, yet if we repent of our sins, and pray for forgiveness and divine grace, the receiving of the holy communion will strengthen and confirm our faith and repentance, and we shall be received as worthy partakers in the sight of God. Thus we find that the excuse of being unfit and unworthy cannot be admitted : but it is an unwillingness to forsake our sins and pleasures, that makes us averse to use this effectual means of grace. If we are conscious of being sinful, we have the
greater

greater need of the sacrament, because that is the most likely means of subduing sin. Let us, therefore, repent and amend, and no longer with-hold from performing this indispensable duty of religion : that so, hereafter, we may be admitted worthy partakers of the promises which our Lord has purchased for us.

C H A P T E R X.

Of the Mortification of the Passions.

IF we have upon our minds a proper conviction of the two different states to which the righteous and the wicked are to be adjudged ; if we hope for the joys and promises of heaven, and fear the punishments and threatenings of hell, we shall naturally pursue such means as will enable us to obtain the former and avoid the latter. And if our conviction arises from a belief of the scriptures wherein these promises and fears are revealed, then reason directs that we should make use of the remedies which they teach, and be admonished of our danger by the intimations which they afford.

Now as there are two conditions after this life, the one of joy, and the other of

torments, or the one of life, and the other of death; and two estates of life in this world as means tending thereto, one evil and another good: for some live after the flesh, and some after the spirit; but they that live after the flesh shall die; but they who by the spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, shall live.

These two contrary ways lead to the different ends of futurity.

In further treating of this subject, I will consider what is meant by living after the flesh; and 2dly, what is meant by mortifying the deeds of the body through the spirit, whereby we shall live.

We are said to live after the flesh, when we suffer either the pleasures or cares of the world to engross our time and attention; and by indulging ourselves in the former, or giving ourselves up as an anxious prey to the latter, we let them take such hold of us, as to draw our minds from more important pursuits and more useful meditations, even those which concern our future and everlasting happiness.

The lusts of the flesh are many and various, for some are addicted to one vice, and some to another: and when a person yields to the influence of some prevailing passion, and with eagerness adheres to the
follies

follies and vanities of the world, he is said to live after the flesh. The apostle tells us that they who live after the flesh, that is, give the reins to their lusts to please their sensual appetites, and desire things according to the corruption of their hearts, shall die. How dangerous, then, is the condition of the epicure, the libertine, and unthinking Christian ! who die in an unregenerate state ; who forget themselves whence they are, and whither they go ; who forget that by setting their affections on the pleasures of this world, they forfeit the felicity of the next, and subject themselves to the punishment of eternal death. By too great an attachment therefore to the care and pleasures of life, regardless of higher things, we live according to the flesh. I will next shew what is meant by mortifying the deeds of the body through the spirit, whereby we shall live.

Whilst we continue in this world the devil will not cease to entice us to sin by one alluring temptation or another ; it behoves us to be always on our guard against his wiles, and to resist this enemy of our salvation. And, for our encouragement herein, God has given us the help of his Spirit ; with which, if our own endeavours co-operate, we have it in our power to effect an escape from his dangerous snares.

St. Paul,

St. Paul, by mortifying the deeds of the body, means, the subduing the lusts and passions ; keeping the mind and body in subjection to the reason ; not to let the cares and riches, the pleasures and vanities of the world, take such hold of us, as to impede our progress in the pursuit of higher felicities ; and, like the seed choaked up with thorns, to bring no fruit to perfection.

In this act of mortification we are not only not to comply with unlawful and forbidden pleasures, but to indulge in those which are innocent and allowable with prudence and moderation, not to excess, or repugnant to reason. The more we give ourselves up to the pleasures of the world, the more our desires increase ; and the more we endeavour to wean ourselves from them, the more clearly we discern their vanity and deceitfulness ; until at last we are utterly averse to such unsatisfactory enjoyments ; and, by the help of the Holy Spirit, have brought ourselves to such a frame of mind, as to be mortified to every earthly pleasure, and entirely at liberty to fix our affections upon things which are pure, holy, and everlasting. The assistance of God's grace, which is never refused to the pious suppliant, gives him a great advantage of knowing and doing things that are pleasing to the Almighty ; and leads and guides to
his

his eternal state. If we would obey the commands of God, and hope for his favour and acceptance, we must, as St. Paul says, mortify the deeds of the body through the spirit. By whose prevailing influence we are to subdue and bring into subjection our passions and appetites. If we yield to the directions of this heavenly monitor, he will help us to refrain the impetuosity of our lusts, and turn our minds another way. The habits of grace increase by exercise; and our duty to God is performed with greater pleasure and delight, the more we devote ourselves to him. Christ's yoke groweth every day more easy; and we are more desirous to root out of the mind an affection for things, whose fallacy we more clearly discern.

A pious life produces a tranquillity of mind, which is not to be obtained by the greatest acquisition of wealth, or the most industrious pursuit of pleasure. The reflections that proceed from having fixed our affections upon the real and solid joys of the future state, in preference to this world's perishable uncertainties, afford a happiness of which nothing can deprive us. Let not sin reign in our mortal bodies, but let us shun its dear-bought pleasures, purchased at the hazard of immortal salvation. Let us, by the exercise of religion,
make

make provision for that state, where we must finally and eternally dwell; and then, in decline of life, when we approach near to death, and being sick of the follies and vanities of this world, we shall (by a continued perseverance in piety) have a more distinct idea and more delightful prospects of that happy place, where we should all earnestly pray to be admitted.

C H A P T E R XI.

Of Death, and the Preparation for it.

THE first thing that occurs in considering this subject is it's certainty; and the next is the uncertainty of the time. After meditating a little on these two, I will shew the necessity of fortifying ourselves by preparation.

Death is that event which puts a final period to our earthly existence: an event common to all mankind; and of escaping which we have not the least colourable hope. It is as natural to die, as to be born; and the many instances which we ourselves behold, demonstrate this truth. The monuments and inscriptions erected to the memory of those who once lived upon earth,

earth, and are by death removed hence, bear witness to the same. And the loss of our friends and relations, whose persons and conversation are yet in our memories, makes deep the impression, and reminds us, that we ourselves must one day suffer the same fate: for as St. Paul says, It is appointed unto all men once to die.

It is an absolute decree of God, who, before the fall, denounced this threat, saying, In the day thou eatest of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt surely die. And after the fall that sentence was confirmed and executed upon our first parents and their posterity; for all either have or must submit to it.

Death is the immutable decree of God, and is natural to mankind. As the woman of Tekoah said, For we must needs die, and are as water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again—2d Samuel, 14th chapter, 14th verse.

2dly. Though death is indeed certain, yet the time and manner of dying to us is uncertain and unknown. For man knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them—Eccles. 9th chapter, 12th verse.

Most of us wish, nay expect, that our lives will be spun out to the longest period : but as we know not the number of our days, we therefore cannot be sure of to-morrow, much less reason have we to flatter ourselves with the prospect of old age. So many and various are the ways by which we may leave these fleeting scenes, and enter upon others that are everlasting, that we ought seriously to consider, and be well aware of the frailty and uncertainty of our present abode. Some are snatched off suddenly in an instant, without any warning of their departure, while others have timely notice by a lingering illness. Mankind are always under the dominion and power of death, but we know not at what stage of life he will exert his power. Many die in their cradles,—just taste of life, and, as it were, disgusted with the world, expire. Many are cut down before they have risen to manhood. Many in their full strength and greatest lustre are deprived of the residue of their years. And but very few in comparison are permitted to reach, what is much wished for, a decrepit old age. It is equally uncertain where, or in what form, death may make his attack upon us ; whether abroad or at home, in the field or on our own bed. The universal conqueror, to whose dart we are always subject, strikes us in different ways.

ways. In confirmation of this, besides our own observation, the scriptures furnish us with a variety of instances, as Abel, who was slain in the field—Gen. 4th. Saul met his end in battle—1st book of Samuel, 31st chap. Abner in treacherous converse with Joab—2d of Samuel, 3d chap. Absalom in an oak.

Whether the power of external injury may forcibly separate our souls from our bodies, as it did those I have mentioned, God only knows: or it may be his divine decree that we shall resign our souls without pain or anguish, or it may please him that the king of terrors may approach us in the most ghastly and terrific appearance; but this to us is a mystery. We most of us hope to live long, and to see good days, but perhaps, instead thereof, the autumn of our lives may be tempestuous and stormy, full of anxiety and trouble; and even at the last we may breathe out our souls in the bitterest agonies.

Now seeing that our departure out of this world is so uncertain, we shall do well always to be prepared for it, by the study and practice of Christian light and knowledge: a method that will fortify us against those fears which so exceedingly disconcert worldly minds. It is surely wisdom to be

prepared for an event that soon or late will certainly happen : for indeed death is the only thing we can be sure of in this unstable world ; and which is at no great distance from any of us, though uncertain. If we only recollect the many instances of people hurried out of the world on a sudden, without one moment's warning ; not being able to utter the smallest ejaculation ; at a time when they least expected, and probably were the most unprepared :—when we recollect that we ourselves are liable to the same fate, we then see the necessity of holding ourselves in a state of readiness and preparation. Consider how dreadful it is to enter upon eternity before we are prepared ; to have our probationary season closed before we have applied it to the intended use ; to be summoned hence before we have, by repentance, escaped the torments of the wicked, and, by good works, deserved and secured an inheritance with the blessed. If we pursue the circumstances of sudden death a little farther, we shall find them very alarming ;—that it happens to those who are not only in an unprepared, but perhaps in a sinful, polluted state. When sudden death happens, as it commonly does, to people unprepared, it is a great evil, and a grievous judgment of God ; because it is a speedy downfall into the
 gulph

gulph of hell. But if a person is prepared and fit to die, it is in effect no death, but only an exemption from pain, and a quick deliverance from this miserable world; which God, of his mercy, vouchsafes them, upon their piety and innocence: under these circumstances sudden death is a great blessing, because it is a speedy entrance upon a happy immortality.

Few in general think of preparing themselves to die, until a severe illness gives them warning of their approaching exit, or they draw near the decline of life. But the fallibility of this conduct plainly appears, when it is considered that they are not certain of being in a condition to repent and prepare;—when labouring under a violent and sore disease, and greatly perplexed in the settlement of worldly affairs, how unlikely and unfit a time is that for preparation; the frequent interruptions of pain, and the visits of friends, hinder and prevent our pious resolutions of repentance, of making our peace with God, and securing an interest in his favour before we go hence, and are no more seen.

But supposing that this last illness will allow leisure for the performance of this duty; yet they are in fact compelled to it, by the fear of death, or rather by the fear
of

of punishment for their negligence and sins. And it is the opinion of many, that a late penitence is seldom real. Let us, then, forsake sin while we are able to commit it, and repent while we are in health and strength ; that we may seem to do it rather by choice than compulsion.

What anxiety and horror must await the dying person, struggling not only with the extreme acute pains which drive the soul from the body ; but also with the pangs of his own conscience. How must he be alarmed when he experiences no benefit by diet or physic ; that all human skill is in vain ; that, notwithstanding their utmost endeavours, he finds his strength almost exhausted and gone ; and that no quiet or relief from exquisite pain can be had, till to this world he shall be no more. The day of our death is a solemn and serious one, and especially so to the wicked ; a day of terrors and alarms ; of direful trouble and distress. Consider, therefore, the urgent necessity of preparing for death before this melancholy time overtakes you ; when the sufferings of a body macerated and torn with pain and anguish, when the sight of lamenting friends and children, the tears of a tender wife, the faint and flattering hopes of recovery, shall distract the mind, and obstruct your making atonement for the errors of past life.

These

These disasters, Reader, you may shortly experience in your own person, and most probably will; unless it please God that your soul shall make its exit suddenly: or that you mitigate them, in wisely fortifying yourself against the hour of death, by the practice of Christian philosophy, and adhere to the rules therein contained and delivered by our merciful Saviour and Redeemer. Armed with such wisdom you may look forward into the eternal world with hope and comfort, relying upon the tender mercy of God to vouchsafe you an easy passage from a corruptible to an incorruptible state, to alleviate the sufferings of the body, or else to enable you, by his Holy Spirit, to endure the pain with patience and fortitude, as greatly inferior to the glory that shall be revealed hereafter.

Lastly, In order to be prepared for death, we must wean ourselves as much as may be from temporal concerns, and not suffer them to engage our attention more than is reasonably necessary to our abode here. We must chiefly fix our affections upon spiritual things, because, though they are future, yet they are certain and everlasting. Too great an attachment to the business and pleasures of life, and too eager a pursuit after worldly possessions and wealth, make men dread their departure, and lightly re-
gard

gard the blessing of heaven : at present they are easy and happy, but generally forgetful of the uncertainty of their condition ; or if they do reflect that they must ere long take an everlasting farewell of all they hold dear, they are then overwhelmed with gloominess and horror ; as the son of Sirach has wisely observed, O death, bitter is the remembrance of thee to the man that is at rest in his possessions, and has nothing to vex him, &c. This is distressful to those whose ideas extend not beyond terrene and perishable things. Let not this reflection disturb our peace in our latter days, but rather be mindful of the words of our Saviour, Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. Let us follow innocence and uprightness in all our actions and behaviour ; that so, by a firm reliance on God's gracious promises, we may meet death, not as an enemy, but as a friend that will conduct us to a better habitation, even to the mansions of the saints in heaven.

CHAPTER

CHAPTER XII.

Of the Qualification of the heavenly Life.

OUR success in obtaining an heavenly inheritance, depends upon our pains and endeavours during these short lives, which, in comparison of eternity, are but a moment. What folly and madness is it then to trifle away our scanty allowance of time wantonly and carelessly, in the pursuit of perishable things, which in a little time will stand us in no stead? And how wrong is it not to treasure up to ourselves such things as hereafter we shall have occasion for, and which will abide with us for ever, and will conduce to our happiness both here and hereafter.

Though a possession in the kingdom of God is offered to all, without exception, by our Saviour; yet it is upon condition that we do the will of his Father who is in heaven. The terms of the gospel, whereby we are to be accepted as worthy partakers of the promises of God, are so gracious and easy, and so mercifully adapted to the nature and frailty of man, that it is unreasonable and vain to expect that any further allowance will be made. The divine laws of our

D d

blessed

blessed Redeemer are plain and clear, and, when faithfully practised, are productive of peace and good-will, and of all the virtues wherewith we must qualify ourselves for the next life. It is necessary, if we desire to be admitted into the society of angels, and of the spirits of just men made perfect, that we habituate ourselves to the practice of those virtues whereof the heavenly life consists. Divine virtues, like other habits (whether good or bad) are to be acquired by practice only. Several of the Christian perfections, as chiefly pertaining to salvation, are explained in the second part of this work, and are set forth as qualifications absolutely necessary for a Christian. The promises of heaven are conditional; if, therefore, we do not conform to and fulfil the conditions, we have no claim or title at all; but are disobedient and no better than rebels. The greatest preparation for heaven is that of frequently commemorating the passion of our Lord in the holy sacrament; without which we have no pretence to the benefits procured thereby. The indispensable obligation we are under to perform and comply with this precept, I have shewn in the 9th chapter of this book.

An heavenly inheritance is so great a reward, and so inestimable a treasure, that, to secure it, we should forego all the pleasures

fures or profits, the honours and possessions of the world ; especially when they stand in competition with our eternal interest. We must consider ourselves as strangers and pilgrims, that have our abode here only for a season ; therefore we should not cultivate in our souls earthly ideas, but heavenly. Godliness and piety must be our study and delight ; for without holiness no man can see the Lord. Let the rules and precepts of the gospel be our meditation and practice in the present life, so shall we in the next, be deemed fit and worthy to join in singing praises and hallelujahs to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for ever and ever.

F I N I S.

